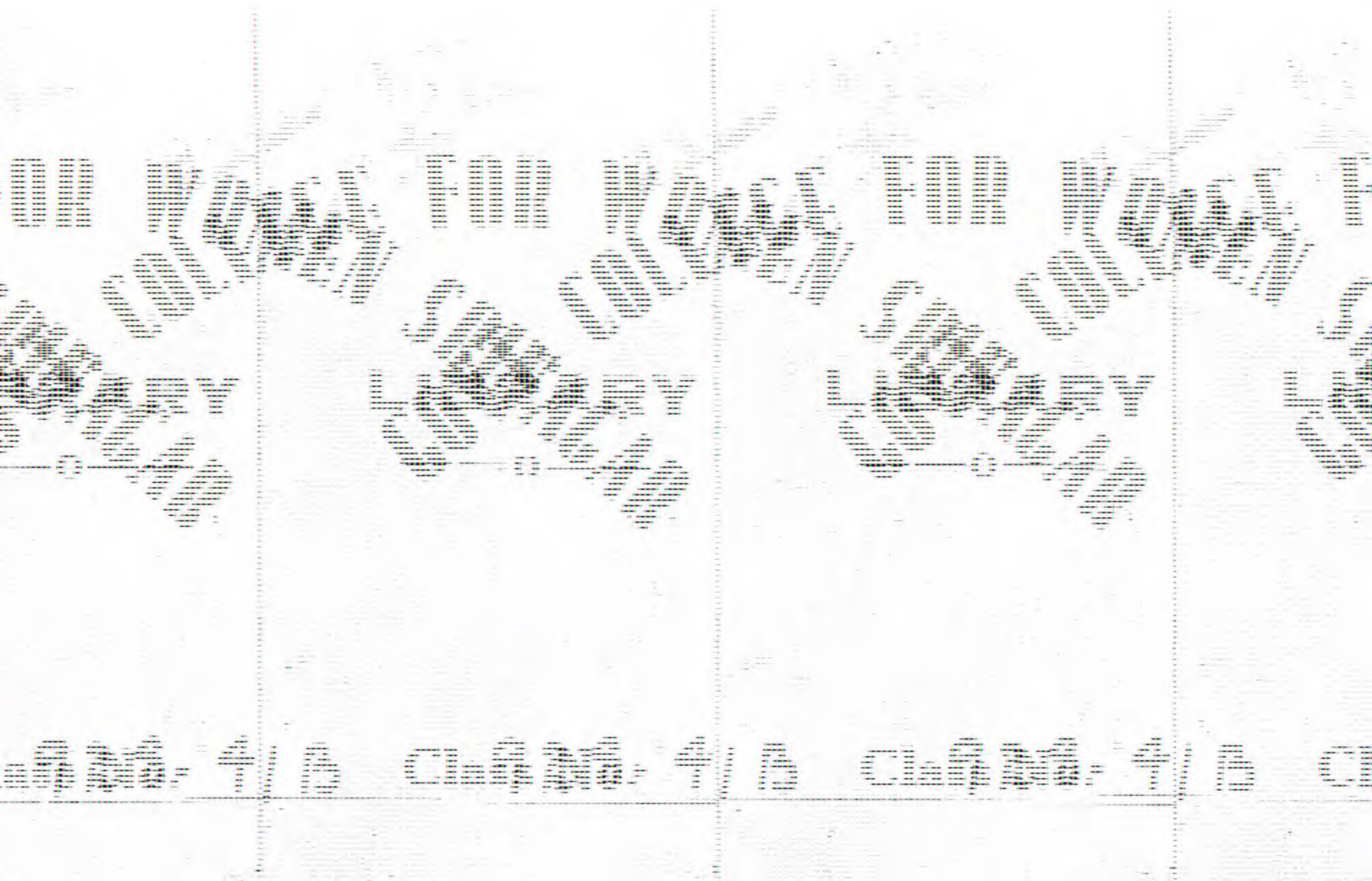

# SHAW

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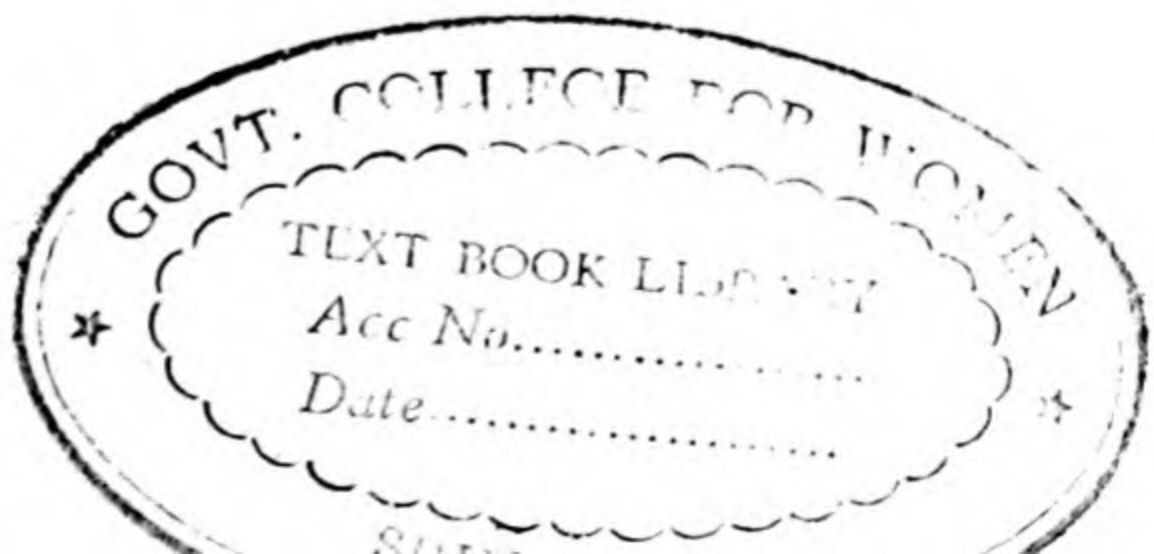

# BY THE SAME AUTHOR:

GUIDE TO PHILOSOPHY

GUIDE TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF MORALS AND POLITICS

A YEAR MORE OR LESS

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# SHAW

by

C. E. M. JOAD

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# NOTE

My thanks are due to Mr. S. Winsten for permission to reproduce in Chapter VII material contributed to a memorial volume, *G.B.S. 90*, and to the *New Statesman* for permission to reprint in Chapter VI articles by Shaw and myself which originally appeared in that journal.

C. E. M. Joad.

Hampstead.
*October, 1948.*

# PREFACE

When Chesterton published a study of Shaw entitled *George Bernard Shaw* in the far-off days before the first World War, Shaw described it as the best book he had yet provoked. Yet it is an intensely individual—some would say, an eccentrically individual—study, which tells us at least as much about Chesterton as it does about Shaw.

I should like to think that the following sketch qualifies for attention by virtue of falling within the same category; for assuredly it qualifies by no other. It is in no sense a full-length study of Shaw's life and work nor, since Hesketh Pearson's admirable biography appeared, is such a study called for.

Hesketh Pearson has done his work so well that to the account he has given us of Shaw's life there is nothing material to add. Here are all the facts which future writers will need for their verdicts, clearly arranged and entertainingly presented. Here, in fact, is all the material for a future authoritative appraisement of George Bernard Shaw. But for authoritative appraisement the time is not yet. Shaw was too Protean a personage to fit into the categories of quick and easy verdicts. He excelled in so many capacities, as prose-writer, pamphleteer, controversialist, orator, wit, political thinker, philosopher and public figure, as well as playwright, that it is difficult to view him as a whole, difficult to see the wood precisely because of the multitudinous excellences of the individual trees. The wood can only be seen in perspective and the formation of a perspective takes time. As we look back from our own vantage point, we can see the impossibility of adequately appraising at the time of his death the stature and work of Voltaire.

What, then, can one hope to do in a sketch of this kind? To disentangle a single strand in the complex

network of influences that Shaw has exerted upon the life and thought of England for half a century, to isolate it and to throw it into relief.

The purpose of the following sketch is to give an account of the impact of Shaw upon the men and women who were born at some time in the 'nineties. I want to bring out what Shaw meant for the young men and women of the generation which came to maturity just before 1914.

We extended to him, many of us, a hero worship that bordered on veneration. He was for us not only a wit who might or might not be funny; he was a philosopher and political thinker whose doctrines were quite indubitably true; he was also, as I shall try to show, a great liberator.

It contributed to our thinking him the greatest of living men—and I still think him the greatest man who has lived in my time—that most people belittled him, deriding him as a mountebank, a fool, a licensed jester (there was a famous Max cartoon which represented Shaw standing on his head and waving his legs in the air) or denouncing him as an advocate of doctrines so outrageous that if by some misfortune they were to be adopted, they would bring society to moral ruin and political destruction, after a period of prolonged decadence such as preceded the fall of ancient Rome.

Thus, a peculiar relish was given to the esteem in which we held Shaw, by the detraction of the great mass of decent, respectable citizens. As a Socialist, a vegetarian, a free-thinker—even, it was commonly averred, a free-lover—Shaw was our peculiar joy and possession precisely because he was anathema to the smug world of Edwardian respectability against which we were in revolt. Few as yet had seen his plays; very few of his plays had, indeed, as yet appeared. Hence, Shaw's appeal and influence at this time was limited to a comparatively small circle of vegetarians, Socialists, pacifists, anarchists and utopiasts—in fact, to all those

who accounted themselves, or were accounted by middle-class society, rebels, progressives or cranks pure and simple. As the author of *Common Sense about the War*, he was soon to become the most unpopular man in the country.

Again, we revered Shaw so much partly because we who revered him were so few; few enough, indeed, to enable us to regard ourselves as a band of the elect pervaded by a common loyalty which was rendered the more intense by the aggressive hostility of the Philistines who prowled outside the fold. It was a somewhat disconcerting experience for us somewhere in the late 'twenties to see the tilter against conventions, the outrager of morals, the leader of forlorn hopes, the subverter of the established order and the flail of the middle classes becoming a national figure, who presently turned into a national legend. Many of us have never quite got over our mortification at watching our private possession purloined by the world, never quite forgiven Shaw for allowing it to happen. For when what was an esoteric cult becomes the religion of the vulgar, there is no longer the same feeling of precarious distinction in belonging to the cult. Nor have we ever quite got rid of the feeling that in becoming the idol of the masses our god has been cheapened in the process. Moreover, views which to-day no longer require defence are no longer embraced with the passion that they evoked when they must be passionately defended.

For these reasons, I want, before memory fails and it is too late, to leave some record of the particular impact which Shaw made upon my generation and of the special kind of feeling that we had for him. Those who came to maturity after the First World War can have little conception of the sharpness of the impact or the intensity of the feeling; for Shaw has not affected any subsequent generations in the same way, nor has any figure which has appeared in the literary world since 1914 made quite the same stir.

Shaw, I suppose, has had more influence upon me than has any other writer or thinker. He liberated me and quickened me and sent blowing through my spirit some gusts of the wind of his own exuberant vitality. He has given me more sheer pleasure than any other writer, and I would like to think that he has done me more good. Certainly I have looked up to him with a reverence which I have felt for no other save in these later years Plato.

Now, the fact that I was born into a particular generation, the generation that came to maturity in the years immediately prior to 1914, was, I conceive, a definite factor in the production of this effect. Hence, this book is an attempt to put on record what Shaw meant to a not unrepresentative young man of that generation.

C. E. M. JOAD.

## CHAPTER I

# BACKGROUND OF HERO-WORSHIP

I BEGIN WITH TWO personal chapters in which I propose to review the reasons for my undergraduate hero-worship and to say something of the contacts with the hero by means of which, as the undergraduate grew into the middle-aged writer and philosopher, it was sustained and renewed.

### *School and University Background*

I came up from Blundells to Oxford in 1910, a reasonably good classical scholar but a complete ignoramus in regard to what was happening in the contemporary world. The Blundells of my day was a good specimen of the traditional type of public school. The masters had been there for so long that they had lost the modicum of interest in the boys which, I suppose, is necessary to keep a master fresh and keen. The boys, for the most part, were the sons of West Country business-men and farmers. Books were not read in their houses, ideas were not discussed. Hence it was not surprising that when they left home for school, no more books should be read than were necessary to enable the reader to scrape through his examinations with the minimum of work.

There was a school debating society where fifty Conservatives and three Liberals—I was one of the three, having become a Liberal, a matter of secret pride but public obloquy, by the exercise of my own independent judgment; the other two were congenital, having been born in Liberal households—used to discuss such comparatively innocuous subjects as capital punishment and the Channel tunnel.

The world of Labour was unknown to us and Socialism had not been heard of. We knew nothing of contemporary art or music and our reading of current literature

was confined to thrillers. For the rest, the school was administered by the gods of the football and cricket fields, and clever little boys, of whom I was one, were alternately cajoled when the gods wanted their proses written or their unseens construed, and ignored or actively persecuted when there was no immediate need of their services.

To transfer such a boy as I was from this archaic atmosphere to that of Balliol was like moving a plant which had hitherto been exposed to a nipping east wind into a well-heated conservatory. Here was a world in which values other than those of the playing field and the running track were acknowledged, where intelligence was regarded with respect and the discussion of books and ideas was accepted as a normal part of everyday life. In this new environment I blossomed and expanded. I joined societies, made speeches at the Union and experienced a rush of ideas to the head. That I should become a Socialist was almost inevitable, for this was the first fresh springtime of Fabianism, when we conceived ourselves to be marching directly into the promised land of State Socialism under the banners of the Webbs and Shaw—Wells was also in the van, albeit slightly out of step—a promised land which in those happy days lay just around the corner. Inevitably, too, I began to make acquaintance with contemporary literature, with Meredith and Hardy, with Chesterton, Galsworthy, Bennett, Wells and Shaw; above all, with Wells and Shaw.

*First Impact of Shaw*

I can still remember with vividness two literary experiences of those days. It so happened that I read about the same time *Tono Bungay* and *Candida*. I don't think that any book has since produced in me quite the same effect of heady exhilaration. The ingredients in this intoxicating intellectual brew were many, but perhaps the chief was my delighted appreciation of the

fun that was made, the ridicule that was cast upon the deities that had oppressed my youth, as one by one they were sent toppling from their pedestals. The decaying feudal system was laughed out of court in the account of Bladesover, while the suburban persons, recently enriched by successful speculation or prosperous business and jumped up into ladies and gentlemen, among whom my holidays were spent, were exhibited in the persons of Uncle Ponderevo and Mrs. Hogberry as pretentious impostors who were also social nuisances.

The description of an unfashionable part of London contained in the introduction to the first act of *Candida* made an even more memorable impression, constituting, as it did, my first introduction to working and lower middle-class life:

> "It is strong in unfashionable middle-class life; wide-streeted; myriad-populated; well served with ugly iron urinals, Radical clubs, and tram lines carrying a perpetual stream of yellow cars; enjoying in its main thoroughfares the luxury of grass-grown 'front gardens' untrodden by the foot of man save as to the path from the gate to the hall door; blighted by a callously endured monotony of miles and miles of unlovely brick houses, black iron railings, stony pavements, slated roofs, and respectably ill dressed or disreputably poorly dressed people, quite accustomed to the place, and mostly plodding uninterestedly about somebody else's work. The little energy and eagerness that crop up show themselves in cockney cupidity and business 'push.' Even the policemen and the chapels are not infrequent enough to break the monotony."

This sort of thing came home to me with the effect of a revelation. About the same time I read Wells's Fabian tract, *This Misery of Boots*. For the first time I realised the injustice of a society in which the poverty and wretchedness of the many were outraged by the

luxury and ostentation of the few; for the first time I understood how meagre and squalid were the lives that most people lived. Yet those who lived so meagrely and squalidly were those who did the work of the world, while all round me—I am writing, it will be remembered of the world of 1912—were over-nourished persons living idle and useless lives in pensions and hotels punctuated by four good meals a day. (I should explain that my vacations in those days were spent in a well-to-do, residential hotel. It was the impression of vacuous inanity made on me by the lives of its inmates that later gave point to my delighted appreciation of Mopsy's definition in *Too True to be Good* of what she calls "inefficient fertilisers." "We do nothing," she explains, "but convert good food into bad manure. We are walking factories of bad manure, that's what we are." In the light of my memories of the Polygon, it seemed the perfect description!)

I am trying here to convey the distinctive character of the first and most outstanding of all the effects that Shaw produced and was subsequently to produce on my consciousness. It was not so much that he made me a Socialist as that he imbued me with a passionate resentment of social injustice and clothed with the flesh and blood of an informed contempt for idle, snobbish, well-to-do people the bare bones of a half-understood economic creed, which I had picked up from the undergraduates of my year and kind.

(I ought perhaps to explain here that I am no economist and have never understood Shaw's economics. *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism* and *Everybody's Political What's What* are the only major Shavian works that I have not been able to read. I don't believe that they are of outstanding importance either as contributions to the subject or as clues to the understanding of Shaw, but this opinion of mine may be only a rationalisation of my own ignorance. But that there should be at least one aspect of a great man that the ordinary man

who writes about him does not understand is not wholly a bad thing. It contributes to mystery in the subject and testifies to modesty in the writer.)

*Delivery from Social Snobbery*

The quotation from *Too True to be Good* opens a new theme; for the oppressive athletes of my school life were far from being the only oppressors from whom Shaw delivered me. If my school made me feel slighted and unworthy in term time, the idle, rich persons and, more particularly, the idle rich women among whom my holidays were spent, with their habit of looking down their noses at an ill-dressed and slovenly young man, made me feel slighted and unworthy during vacations. With the rapier of his wit and the bludgeonry of his argument, Shaw delivered me from the sense of discomfort which these persons engendered. He stripped them of the trappings with which money, birth, leisure and fashion had decked them and opened my eyes to a view of them which I had not the insight to achieve for myself.

*The Myth of the Lady*

For example, he dispelled the air of mystery in which, for young men of my generation, women were shrouded. I had grown up wrapped in a cloud of unknowing to regard women as beings at once shining and remote. Precisely because I was crude and ill-dressed, they took little notice of me and, when they did, shamed me into feeling acutely conscious of my social deficiencies. And how mysterious they still were. The first decade of the twentieth century was the aftermath of the Victorian lady. Ladies were not what they had been, but they were still formidable creatures whose inaccessibility made them awesome. For one thing, whatever is covered is apt to be mysterious, and, except when they partially undressed for dinner, the bodies of ladies were still largely concealed. In the age of hobble skirts, it was

even permissible to doubt whether they had legs, so much so, that I grew up to the age of ten believing women to be solid pillars of flesh down to the ankles, where they branched out into two feet.

Shaw deflated the myth of the lady and delivered me from the dominance of women. There was Gloria, for example, in *You Never can Tell*. What could be more unladylike than her treatment of Valentine? There was Anne Whitfield in *Man and Superman*, who actually went to the length of pursuing, instead of being pursued by Tanner. This, I must admit, I found difficult to credit; it constituted too startling a reversal of my existing notions, especially when I learnt from the Preface that Anne's behaviour was typical. The *rôle* of women, I was there assured, was set for them from the first by the Life Force and it was quite simply to pursue and capture men and turn them, first, into mates and then into bread winners for the children who resulted from the mating, the difference between one woman and another being merely a difference in the degree of hypocritical concealment with which they thought it prudent to cloak their intentions.

Most important of all, Shaw told me that women were my equals, creatures just like myself, and with that the legend of their mysterious uniqueness was dispelled once and for all. "How is it, Mr. Shaw," I once heard a lady ask him at a public meeting, "that you manage to write so understandingly about women? You seem to be able to penetrate into their very souls."

"Madam," he replied, "that is easy. I simply ask myself what in any given situation I myself would have felt, said or done, and then I make my women characters feel, say and do precisely that." The assumption, you see, is that at bottom women are human beings in precisely the same sense as that in which men are.

I have come to believe this assumption to be profoundly untrue. Indeed, I doubt whether Shaw himself seriously and sincerely entertained it. I prefer to believe

that he was pulling the lady's leg. Certainly Gloria, living embodiment of the ruthlessness of the Life Force seeking its fulfilment, Prossy, selflessly and hopelessly enslaved to the Reverend James Mavor Morell, Lady Cicely, laughing Captain Brassbound's childish revenge fantasies out of court, and Candida, with her infinite capacity for mothering—"Ask me what it costs to be James's mother and three sisters and wife and mother to his children all in one. . . . Ask the tradesmen who want to worry James and spoil his beautiful sermons who it is that puts them off. When there is money to give, he gives it; when there is money to refuse, I refuse it. I build a castle of comfort and indulgence and love for him, and stand sentinel always to keep little vulgar cares out"—are not in the least like Shaw, nor, I must confess, are they particularly like the women one meets. (Yet as to this last it would be the part of modesty to profess agnosticism, since I have never been able to ascertain to my own satisfaction what the women one meets *are* like.) So far as concerns Shaw's portrayals of women, I cannot resist the temptation to quote Stevenson's comment, recorded by Chesterton, on *Cashel Bryon's Profession*, which William Archer had sent out to Samoa for Stevenson to read: "I say, Archer—my God, what women!"

But whether Shaw's female characters are or are not like women, they are certainly not like ladies, and what Shaw did for me was to disembarrass my mind once and for all of the notion that women were ladies. Entering the lists as the woman's champion demanding that women should be emancipated, that the vote should be given to them and that the doors of the professions should be open to them, Shaw not only gave women the freedom to do as men did, but gave men the freedom to treat women as if they were men. The mystery, the remoteness, the sacro-sanctity—all were gone; one was friend and comrade, one was even "hail fellow well met," and one could accordingly say what

one thought in whatever language most appropriately conveyed one's thoughts.

I must admit that in my early contacts with women I found myself, to my surprised consternation, embroiled in a succession of embarrassing and embittering situations precisely because I insisted on taking Shaw seriously to the extent of expecting women to behave as I would have myself behaved—that is to say, rationally;[1] but I can never be sufficiently grateful to him for giving me the licence to give women a piece of my mind, to be, in fact, as rude to them as I pleased. Here, then, was another of the chains which Shaw struck from my public-school-Victorian-ridden youth. A third was the chain of Empire.

*The Myth of the Empire*

The public-school class in which I was brought up came out strongly on the subject of the Empire. Under the influence of Kipling, the Empire became a cult and Empire loyalty a mystique. An early devotee, I enrolled myself a member of a British Empire society which introduced me to a "pen pal"—that is to say, to a boy living in South Africa, with whom I was expected to correspond, thus forging a link of Empire. Oh, the boredom of those laboured and impersonal letters! The bewildered searching for material to put into them! Compared with it, writing home once a week to one's people was child's play.

At my preparatory school the political horizon had also been bounded by Kipling. *Stalky and Co.* and *Plain Tales from the Hills* were read to us on Sunday evenings, making such an impression on our youthful minds that we clamoured to be allowed to grow up in order that we might the quicker assume the "White Man's Burden." At Blundells the same creed was professed, though its formulation was less explicit. The British Empire was a

[1] In a later chapter (see Chapter VIII, pp. 217) I hazard the suggestion that my early surprise at the essentially non-Shavian behaviour of women may derive from a difference between the bodily constitutions of Shaw and myself.

thing unique in history, a testimony to an immense and continuing patriotism, a monument of disinterested self-sacrifice, a witness to racial superiority, which, conscious of itself, willingly accepted the burdens which its superiority imposed. In acquiring such an Empire and in sustaining the burden of its government, the British, we were given to suppose, were suffused with the consciousness of *noblesse oblige*. What benefits we conferred upon our differently pigmented fellow men by consenting to govern them—not least, the benefit of Christianity. . . . Into this atmosphere of artificial fine feeling there came the voice of Shaw: "One can see . . . that our present system of imperial aggression, in which, under pretext of exploration and colonisation, the flag follows the filibuster and trade follows the flag, with the missionary bringing up the rear, must collapse when the control of our military forces passes from the capitalist classes to the people." It is not difficult to imagine the effect of this kind of thing upon an impressionable young mind in full reaction against the imperialist mystique in which it had been brought up. A whole house of cards came fluttering about my ears, never, thank God, to be rebuilt.

*Shaw as Liberator*

I am trying to illustrate by instances the effect of liberation with which Shaw's writings came to me and to other young men of my generation. He struck off the chains of conventions not of our making, and left us free to make our own. The fact that the notions which we substituted for those we discarded were often Shaw's was a tribute, I thought then and think still, to the constructive power of his thought. He not only believed in the power of reason to expound and convince; he was himself the prince of expositors and convincers. But that aspect of Shaw belongs to another chapter; for the present, I am concerned with his advent as a liberator. Let me try to define it more precisely.

The early years of the century were oppressed by a system of conventions to a degree of which the present generation can have no conception. The Victorians had bequeathed to us a serried army of lay figures wherewith to furnish the chambers of our minds: figures of respectability and decency, figures of ladies and of the behaviour proper to ladies, figures of parents and of respect for parents, figures of the sexes and of the relations between the sexes—a figure of lust for men and of innocence for women, who did not really enjoy sexual love, but who considered it to be their duty to pretend to, because of their noble natures—all of them dominated by a swollen, pink figure of Britannia guarding the waves and presiding over a progeny of conventions, conventions about church-going and the behaviour generally proper to Sundays, about the fecklessness and improvidence and general inferiority of the poor, about the wickedness of the body, which must be seen as little as possible, about the wickedness of music-halls, about the wickedness even of billiard saloons. . . .

These were the settled furnishings of the moral and social world into which we had been born, furnishings which, it seemed, nothing could ever shift. Through the ribs of these lay figures, Shaw and Wells passed the rapiers of their wit and let out some sawdust and a little bran and, lo and behold! for us they were not there any more. The Dead March in the *Eroica Symphony* goes on for what seems a very long time; gloomier and more sombre grows the music, slower and slower the pace, as one by one the lights of hope and zest and joy go out. It is all very oppressive, and by the end of the movement one is feeling very low indeed. Into this atmosphere of oppressive gloom there breaks suddenly the dancing measure of the scherzo, and in an instant all is changed. It is exactly as if a pretty housemaid had come tripping into a long-shut-up room, heavy with hangings, shrouded in dust sheets, overfurnished.

She opens the windows, flings back the shutters and lets in the air and the sweet, fresh smells of spring. Morning bird-song is heard through the open windows, the room is alive with sunlight and, as she dusts the furniture, motes dance in its beams. It is precisely with that effect of liberation that Shaw burst into the closed chamber of late Victorian conventions; he opened the doors of our minds and let in light and air and freedom.

*On Sentimentality*

Not least in the matter of sentimentality. I do not know how to define sentimentality. Meredith's "fiddling harmonics on the strings of sensuality" is not bad, although it covers only part of the ground. Its merit consists in the suggestion of counterfeit that it conveys. One is pretending to have feelings that one does not have, but thinks that one ought to have, or pretending that the feelings that one does have are different from what they, in fact, are, or pretending to have feelings in excess of what is due and appropriate to the ostensible object of the feelings. And it is not merely upon others that one is imposing; one is imposing upon oneself. Presently, if one is lucky, one finds oneself out and is suffused by a feeling of violent reaction from the false or excessive emotions which one had artificially entertained, a reaction which often pushes one into the opposite defect of cynicism. Two distinct offences are involved in sentimentality; one an offence against truth, the other against the due, the appropriate, what, in fact, Aristotle called "the mean."

Now, the age in which I grew up was, I think, sentimental above the average; I also think, or like to think, that the degree of discomfort engendered by sentimentality in myself was above the average. It was an age of sentimental songs, in which the commonplace emotions of a mother for her child were represented as quite uniquely wonderful and holy; of sentimental novels and plays, in which the ordinary feelings of any

young man for any young woman were invested with a mystical import. Highly-born young women were run off with to subside into penury and rose-covered cottages, whence they asseverated that the world was well lost for love; mothers watched by the bedsides of commonplace, sick little boys and the poignancy of their grief was represented as being of cosmic significance. Personal relations, in fact, were the real life for ever and ever.

Oh, the boredom of it! The boredom of trying to keep up the pretence that these emotions of love and grief were really as important as the songs and the novels and the plays pretended; the boredom of the poor chap bemused by sentimental literature who had finally got his young woman into his arms, only to find, when the first transports were over, that they had nothing to say to each other; the boredom of the bedside watchings; the boredom of deaths and births and funerals. For grief, even if it be grievous, *is* boring, and in its boringness lies its sting. Into this world of hot-house emotions, the world which in my experience did duty for art and literature, Shaw came blowing like a breath of fresh air.

*Funerals*

It was, indeed, in his capacity of arch anti-sentimentalist that Shaw first appealed to me. Let me give one or two examples. My youth had been oppressed by death and the paraphernalia of the preparations for death. What a "to-do" we made about funerals! What parade we made of our grief in the present, and what expectations we entertained of benefits to come in the future. It is, I think, George Eliot who says somewhere that "worldly faces never look so worldly as at a funeral." The poor made even more fuss than we did, stinting and starving themselves while life lasted in order that they might be buried with pomp when they were dead. And then I came in *An Unsocial Socialist* upon the exhilarating passage of arms between Mr. Trefusis and the family doctor on the occasion of the death of

Trefusis's wife, culminating in Trefusis's assertion that "Jansenius"—his father-in-law—"can bear death and misery with perfect fortitude when it is on a large scale and hidden in a back slum. But when it breaks into his own house and attacks his property—his daughter was his property until very recently—he is just the man to lose his head and quarrel with me for keeping mine." "What," he goes on to exclaim, "have I to complain of? She had a warm room and a luxurious bed to die in, with the best medical advice in the world. Plenty of people are starving and freezing to-day that we may have the means to die fashionably; ask *them* if they have any cause for complaint."

How I revelled in that scene; how, indeed, I revelled in the whole book. It blew away for me once and for all a world of hypocrisy and make-believe.

*Family, Home and Love*

Then there were family life and the home! What a fuss we made about the home: the home was holy, the home was sacred, we all loved one another very much and could not possibly love anybody else half as much. The wife loved and respected the husband; the husband loved and cherished the wife; the children looked up to both, and so on. . . . One even loved one's uncles and aunts!

My own home life was, perhaps, exceptionally unhappy, being in fact a little hell of quarrelling, but what I have since seen of other English interiors has led me to believe that it was not quite so exceptional as my childish inexperience supposed. Shaw blew the myth of the loving family sky high. After describing the ideal of family life in the Preface to *Getting Married* as a group of people "stewing in love continuously from the cradle to the grave," he had gone on to stigmatise the real thing as an "unnatural packing into little brick boxes of little parcels of humanity of ill-assorted ages, with the old scolding and beating the young for behaving

like young people, and the young hating and thwarting the old for behaving like old people, and all the other ills, mentionable and unmentionable, that arise from excessive segregation." It was also "the girl's prison and the woman's workhouse" and "no more natural to us than a cage is natural to a cockatoo."

With the memory of my own home life vividly in my mind, I was led to denounce the home, declaring that the family should be broken up, that girls should be enabled to enjoy the same freedoms, including the same sexual freedoms as boys, and that children should be forcibly removed from parental care and brought up by the State. (It was Shaw, I think, who first put me on to the argument—I subsequently found a similar thought in Plato's *Republic*—which runs as follows: if you want to build a battleship or a bridge or a house, you go to a man specially trained in the job, go, in fact, to the expert shipbuilder, engineer or architect. But if you want to build something which is of infinitely greater importance than bridges and ships and houses—namely, a citizen of a modern, civilised democracy—then you are content to delegate the job to any chance pair of persons who happen to be able to produce one which, given that they are of different sexes, is all too fatally easy.)

And what a pleasure it was in the light of all that had been dinned into me on the subject of discipline and the training of character—"It's character, my boys, that matters, not brains" had been the theme of all the sermons and prize-giving speeches under which I had suffered at my public school—to read that "the vilest abortionist is he who attempts to mould a child's character," while, as for the transports of romantic love, what could have been calculated more effectually to discredit them than the Maiden's declaration in the last play of *Back to Methuselah*: "We used to think it would be nice to sleep in one another's arms; but we never could go to sleep because our weight stopped our circulations just above the elbows."

*Vegetarianism, Pacifism and Socialism*

Let me add three more examples. There was a period, mercifully brief, of my existence during which under Shaw's influence I became a vegetarian. (The period, a miserable one, terminated when the accumulating demands of natural appetite, springing from a physical make-up very different from Shaw's,[1] coupled with the indescribable insipidity of vegetarian food, sent me in search of a more highly coloured diet.) During this period I found myself assailed, as no doubt do most vegetarians, with the charge of maudlin humanitarianism. It was Shaw who enabled me to explain that I objected to taking the life of animals, not because I liked animals or wished to save them pain, but because I wanted to eliminate waste. To take animal life, he taught me, was not so much wicked as wasteful.

I was—indeed, am still—a pacifist. Pacifists also were accused of a milk and water humanitarianism; they were afraid of good honest violence and good red blood; they put too high a value upon human life; they enormously exaggerated the reasonableness and the niceness of human nature, and so on. What a godsend to the pacifist assailed by these familiar charges was Bluntschli, who came breezily blowing—there is no other word for it—into *Arms and the Man* to explain that all soldiers were afraid, that he carried chocolates rather than bullets because they were more useful to him, and that he did not take an enemy's life, even when he could do so with ease and dispatch, because taking life was so wasteful. How valuable the store of ammunition afforded by Bluntschli's speeches for those who, finding their pacifism attacked on the ground of sentimentality, set themselves the task of defending it with good, utilitarian, common-sensical reasons. Napoleon's observations in *The Man of Destiny* were also a mine of useful material.

A pacifist, again, was apt to be charged with cowardice

[1] See Chapter VIII.

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because he did not subscribe to the "eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth" doctrine. What, not repay injury with injury? Not bash the man who had bashed you? Not assault the neighbour who showed symptoms of desiring or abducting your wife? Not hit the German who was after your sister? What lily-livered pusillanimity! If you pointed out that these precisely were the methods repudiated by the New Testament, you were reminded that Christ Himself said that He came to bring not peace, but a sword. And who, anyway, were you to take it upon yourself to interpret the New Testament?

How refreshing in the circumstances were the speeches with which Lady Cicely in *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* laughs Brassbound's sacred mission of revenge out of court, by pointing out that vengeance is not so much wicked as foolish is, in fact, romantic, schoolboy nonsense, being as much beneath the attention of a sensible, as it is incompatible with the dignity of a mature, man. That, after all, Lady Cicely implies, is the sort of thing that adolescents do; but when people grow up, they give up schoolboy practices precisely because experience shows that they don't bring satisfaction.

As a final example, I cite Socialism. Socialists in those days were constantly being taunted with a putative love of the poor. An inverted snobbery was imputed to us, so that a man had only to be horny-handed, ill-dressed and foul-mouthed, to drop his aitches, spit in public and smoke shag in clay pipes and we identified him, so we were told, with the salt of the earth. (I venture to point out in passing that this charge of inverted snobbery did, in fact, apply with some force to the Marxist and semi-Marxist intellectuals of the 'thirties, who produced a whole literature in praise of muscular, monosyllabically illiterate comrades.) Nor, indeed, was it easy to preach the abolition of slums, the granting of holidays with pay, family allowances, and the comprehensive insurance of all citizens against sickness, unemployment and want, not to speak of

equality of incomes, the nationalisation of industry and the transfer of the means of production, distribution and exchange to public ownership, without incurring the accusation of abasing one's own in order the better to exalt the working class. What was there after all, we were asked, about the working class that we should so concern ourselves on its behalf? And so this concern of ours was generally ascribed at best to the sentimentality of innocent greenhorns, at worst, to the hypocrisy of political careerists.

How valuable to those thus assailed was the hint conveyed by Shaw's declaration that he was a Socialist not because he liked the working class, but because he did not, and that he wished to change them precisely in order that they might become worthy of being liked. "I have never had any feelings about the English working classes," he wrote, "except a desire to abolish them and replace them by sensible people."

The whole of the Preface to *Major Barbara* is from this point of view a mine of anti-sentimental ammunition. There is nothing agreeable about poverty; on the contrary, poverty corrupts and degrades. It narrows a man's life and clouds his wits, so much so that "the crying need of the nation is not for better morals, cheaper bread, temperance, liberty, culture, redemption of fallen sisters and erring brothers, nor the grace, love and fellowship of the Trinity, but simply for enough money." For money is "the most important thing in the world. It represents health, strength, honour, generosity and beauty as conspicuously and undeniably as the want of it represents illness, weakness, disgrace, meanness and ugliness." Poverty ought to be abolished; indeed, the only thing that is the matter with the poor is their poverty which is to say that everything is the matter with them, from wastefulness to ignorance, from gross and untidy habits to weakness of will and infirmity of purpose, from feckless improvidence to culpable unreliability. In a word, one was a Socialist demanding

a change in the social system in order to produce a change in the natures of the poor, its victims, precisely because one didn't like the poor, had no respect for them and wanted them to be superseded.

What an armoury of weapons Shaw provided with which at once to support one's own convictions and to rebut the charge of sentimentality. It was not, it appeared, the Socialist, the progressive, the pacifist, the vegetarian who was sentimental; it was the militarist, the Tory, the meat-eater, the realist, the hard-headed men of business and the tough skinned men of the world.

*Summary*

I am trying by means of these illustrations to convey the effect of liberation with which Shaw came to my generation. We had grown up, as I have said, oppressed by the lay figures that had come down to us from the Victorian age, when they had not been lay but very much alive. These figures dominated the horizons of our thoughts and narrowed the possibilities of our lives. Shaw deposed them and released us from the thraldom they had imposed. From ladies and fixed ideas about ladies; from the cult of war and the idea that there was something noble in killing at the orders of the State; from the cult of Empire and the idea that there was something ethically admirable in ruling large numbers of other men against their will; from the snobbery of wealth and rank and from the inverted snobbery which attributed desirable ethical qualities to poverty and detected a mystical virtue in manual labour; from sentimentality about funerals and families and the duty of revenge.

In Greek legend a certain king, Midas, is endowed with the property of transforming everything he touches into gold. (Incidentally, he starves, since it is difficult to swallow food without touching it and man cannot live by gold alone.) Shaw had what might be termed the anti-Midas touch. From whatever he touched he stripped

the gold and showed it to be not gold at all, but only gilt and tawdry.

I cannot resist the conclusion that, had he known the hero-worship he inspired, he would have been the first to deride and to dispel it, pointing out that there were no great men and women, but only ordinary ones, and that he was as ordinary as any, in respect of which statement—had he made it—he would, I suggest, have been profoundly mistaken.

## CHAPTER II

## PERSONAL ENCOUNTERS

I VENTURE TO SUPPORT my assertion that Shaw would have been profoundly mistaken by recording my opinion that, of the famous men and women I have met, Shaw and two others were the only ones who did not turn out to be profoundly disappointing—the others, by the way, were Gandhi and Charlie Chaplin.

I first saw Shaw in 1913, my third year at Oxford, when he visited the University to give a public lecture in the Schools on the origin of the drama. The University had turned out in force, some to do him honour, more out of curiosity, and the place was packed. I had a seat in the embrasure of a window, high up in the wall. As the tall, erect figure, stiff as a ramrod, came striding down the central aisle, the place shook with applause. Glowing with hero-worship, I gazed with rapture, more particularly upon the hair which still bore traces of red, the rampant moustache and the beard, every hair of which seemed to bristle with vitality.

### *Shaw's Voice*

I cannot remember what Shaw said, but I do remember the voice. I shall try in the next chapter to give some account of Shaw as a platform orator, but,

since this was the first time I heard it, it seems appropriate to write here of the effect of his voice. It was without exception the most attractive voice I had heard up to that time; it seems so still. Ramsay MacDonald's was more sonorous; Maxton's was richer; Maud Royden's, at the height of her powers, was more moving; that of Middleton, the gardener, more comforting; but for the particular purposes for which Shaw's voice was chiefly employed, the purposes of argument, exposition and demonstration—and these after all were the purposes for which I chiefly wished to cultivate and use my own voice—I have never heard its equal. It was extremely musical and the articulation was as near perfect as makes no matter, with the result that one could hear every word that Shaw said. Now, audibility, which is the first requirement in a public speaker, is also the one most rarely fulfilled.

This melodious voice was very pleasant to listen to, so pleasant that it enabled its owner to make assertions which, coming from any other speaker, would have been immediately challenged, and to rebuke and even on occasion outrageously to insult his audience without causing a riot. You took the rebukes and the insults in your stride, because the intonation in Shaw's voice took them so obviously for granted. The voice was so fresh, so easy, so bland, so confidential, as if it wanted you to share its confidences, its intonation conveyed so persuasive a suggestion of there being no deception, of Shaw having, as it were, nothing whatever up his oratorical sleeve that, had there been all the deception in the world, you would nevertheless not only have been taken in, but would have been glad to have been taken in.

At the same time, the voice was indifferent, casual, almost nonchalant, as if Shaw did not care a row of pins whether you agreed with him or not. It was this habit of his of conveying what were then the most outrageous sentiments—as, for example, that everybody's income ought to be equal irrespective of work done, or

that incorrigible criminals or invalids ought to be painlessly eliminated—that first took my breath away and then filled me with inexpressible gratification. The voice was used with the artistry of a master, so that while in retrospect I do not doubt that the owner's intention was to produce precisely the conviction that the voice did in fact produce—namely, that what was so obvious to the speaker must be equally obvious to everyone in the audience who was not a congenital idiot—this intention was carefully concealed. Shaw's Irish accent was, of course, a gift from the gods. If one rates the English accent and the English intonation at par, then the plus value of the Irish accent and intonation above par seems to me to be about equal to the minus value of the American accent and intonation below it. An Irishman has only to ask me to pass the mustard or state the time and I experience a slight thrill of pleasure, just as I never see an American film star open his or her mouth without steeling myself to withstand the impact of the distasteful sounds that are about to proceed from it. If the star be female, the feeling of distaste expresses itself in the form of a little shudder which runs down the length of the spine. Now, the agreeableness of Shaw's Irish accent was outstanding even for an Irishman.

Returning to that first revelation—I can call it no other—in the Schools at Oxford, I make frank avowal that the combined effect of the figure, the voice, the intonation, the accent, and the gestures was to sweep me off my feet so completely that, where Shaw is concerned, I have never succeeded in getting convincingly on to them again.

*On Civilisation*

The following day Gilbert Murray, with whom Shaw was staying, asked a number of us to lunch to meet the great man. As most of my readers will have come to maturity since the 1914-18 War, let me take this opportunity of putting on record for their information

that civilisation, in any rational meaning of the word, may be said to have come to an end in August, 1914. Those of us who were adults did not realise this at the time; it is only now when we look back that we see that it was indeed so, from which it follows that most of my readers have never experienced civilisation and don't, except by hearsay, know what it was like to live in a civilisation.

What do I mean by a civilisation? That obviously is a question which cannot be answered here.[1] I venture, however, to hazard the view that *one* of the things which the notion of a civilisation includes is a respect for the practitioners of the arts. Another is a ready recourse to books, music, poetry and painting as the normal topics of casual and polite conversation. Prior to 1914, writers, artists, musicians, philosophers, critics possessed an importance which they have never achieved since. The State did not press so hardly upon us then as it does now, and we did not therefore have to concern ourselves overmuch with politicians, civil servants and various types of officials. In point of fact, there were not many civil servants with whom to concern ourselves. Again, prior to 1914, our attention was not forced upon foreign affairs or even upon home affairs, which meant that we did not have to spend our time talking about Communism and Fascism and the possibility of Soviet aggression in Europe, or about the prospects of starvation in Germany or of famine in India, or about inflation and disinflation, or about the convertibility of dollars and multilateral trade. Scientists, moreover, had yet to make themselves so formidable with their evil discoveries that science and the applications of science could no longer be ignored. In those happy days a knowledge of practical science and an acquaintance with the habits of machines had yet to be reckoned part of the equipment of an educated man. Hence, nobody wanted to know about the internal constitutions, modes of workings and

[1] I have tried to answer it in a lengthy volume, published in 1948, called *Decadence*.

respective merits of various types of internal combustion engine and nobody was ashamed not to know about them.

And so we were free to talk about books and music and plays and pictures and philosophy and ideas in general, and held the producers and distributors of these commodities in high honour.

*A Luncheon Party*

Five undergraduates had been invited to lunch, and we filed in together looking, I have no doubt, sheepish enough. I know that in my own case the sensation of being introduced to Shaw was so overwhelming that I felt, as I suppose a newly ordained clergyman would feel, if he were to meet an incarnation of the Deity. I sweated at the palm and my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth, as I tried to stammer my few broken sentences. Gilbert Murray did his best to put us at our ease by asking Shaw what he would talk about. "Here are three dramatists," he said—three of us were from the O.U.D.S.—"and a couple of Socialists"—two of us were on the executive of the Fabian Society. "Which is it to be, Shaw, Socialism or the Drama?"

I can't remember Shaw's decision, but I do remember that he talked about anything and everything. I remember, too, thinking, in so far as my veneration had left me the power of independent judgment, that Shaw's demeanour, though benevolent, was embarrassingly impersonal. I mean that he discoursed to us with an impartiality which appeared to be unaware of any differences there might be between us; if he did notice that any one of us was different from any other, he did not mark the fact by his manner. The effect of this first contact was to rivet the shackles of my enslavement so tightly that the use of my intellectual limbs has been constricted by "Shaw-worship" ever since.

The next occasion on which I saw its object was on a special visit which I made from Oxford to London to see the first night of *Fanny's First Play*. The play was a

tremendous success; it was, indeed, the first of Shaw's plays to make him known to a wider public than the Socialists, vegetarians, pacifists, anti-vivisectionists, lovers of wit and argument and oratory and invective, in short, than the "intellectuals" generally, of whom Shavian audiences had hitherto consisted, and when the curtain went down, the cries for "Author!" were vociferous and persistent. Shaw came striding jerkily on to the stage, radiating self-confidence and bursting with vitality. The applause redoubled. After it had continued for several minutes, Shaw held up his hand for silence. In the momentary lull before he began to speak there issued from the gallery a single long-drawn and very sibilant hiss. Shaw looked in the direction of the hisser and smiled. "My dear sir," he said, "I thoroughly agree with you. But who are we among so many?" whereat he turned on his heel and strode off the stage.[1] That seemed to me then, as it seems to me still, to be an almost perfect example of Shavian repartee. I went home to bed dazzled, delighted and determined to achieve a similar readiness of speech.

*Summer Schools and* Back to Methuselah

After the First World War, I became a fairly constant attender of Fabian Summer Schools, at some of which Shaw was present. Indeed, the possibility of meeting and talking to him was one of the motives that caused me to attend.

In 1919 and the early '20s the School was held at a vegetarian establishment, Penlea, on the Devonshire coast near Dartmouth. Shaw, who was living intermittently in a chalet a hundred yards distant from the main building of the School, was engaged in playwriting. At luncheon I used to sit at his table excited by the proximity, thrilled to hear him ask for the salt, delighted to be able to pass it. But I found conversation

[1] Hesketh Pearson tells a similar story of the first night of *Arms and the Man*. If he is right, I can only suppose that Shaw very properly took the view that it was a pity to waste such an admirable repartee on a single occasion.

difficult. Shaw's talk sprayed continuously like a fountain, but he seemed never to pay much attention to what anybody said to him in return; certainly, not to what I said, so that, instead of the give and take of conversation, there was Shavian monologue. Talk to which you must listen without contributing is one of the best recipes for the production of boredom and non-listening talkers are among the world's greatest bores. In Shaw's case it was only the extreme interest of the matter which prevented the almost unbroken monologue from producing its customary effect. To a large extent, this matter consisted of anecdotes of famous people. Shaw had met everybody worth meeting and when he began, "once when I was staying with Hardy . . ." or "Meredith used to tell me . . ." or "I always tell Wells that his real trouble is . . ." I was enchanted.

In the afternoon Shaw could be seen bathing; it was an odd sight. His limbs seemed to me to be insufficiently geared up to their central directing agency, with the result that they appeared to be possessed of wills of their own, striking out each in its individual direction and operating with a fine idiosyncratic independence of one another. Shaw's dancing gave one the same impression; whether his partners shared it, I cannot tell; they were too respectful to say.

It was, I think, the Summer School of 1920 that was rendered memorable by Shaw's reading of *Back to Methuselah*. Shaw, who never appeared until midday, spent the mornings writing, and sometimes in the evening he would read to the assembled School what he had written. The reading was most impressive. Shaw sat in front of a reading-desk with a candle on either side of him, the rest of the hall being in darkness. Much has been written about Shaw's histrionic powers. We have been told how, at rehearsals, he would put the actors through their paces, demonstrating to them by gesture and intonation exactly how their parts should be played. We have heard how deeply these Shavian

performances impressed those who were privileged to see them, and how actors who had begun by resenting the implied suggestion that they did not know their own business succumbed in the end to their recognition of Shaw's superiority of insight and judgment, no less than to his invincible good humour. But anybody who has not actually heard Shaw read one of his plays can have no conception of the charm and power of his presentation.

Shaw's voice, of course, was an enormous asset; apart from its intrinsic melodiousness, it was wonderfully flexible, and he could convey the slightest *nuance* of meaning by changes of intonation. There stand out more particularly in my mind the reading of the first play of the *Back to Methuselah* pentateuch and the intensity of meaning which Shaw put into the Serpent's utterances, more especially those in which he supplies Eve with the appropriate words for the conceptions to which she is feeling her way. "Imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire; you will what you imagine; and at last you create what you will." As I write, it is Shaw's tones that I hear and not those of the many competent actors whom I have subsequently seen in the part.

Nor was the impression made upon me by Shaw's reading of his plays unusual. Many have testified to the power and charm of his reading. "His readings," says Hesketh Pearson, "were extraordinarily vivid. He had an unerring dramatic sense; each character was carefully differentiated and he could maintain the voice peculiar to each right up to the end of the play without the least suggestion of strain; he was never monotonous; he used no gestures, getting his effects solely by the tempo and modulation of his voice; and he never seemed to strike a false note, his intonations exactly expressing the mood and meaning of the speaker."

The following extract from an account by Gilbert Murray of a reading by Shaw of the manuscript of *Major Barbara*, the play in which Cusins, the Professor

of Greek, is generally supposed to have been modelled on Murray himself, bears out Hesketh Pearson's judgment:

> "He read it in his own inimitable way, bubbling with laughter, like a boy, and also showing delicately the most varied shades of feeling. I think I enjoyed his reading of his plays more than any performance of them. At the end of Act II, my wife and I were thrilled with enthusiasm, especially at the Salvation Army scenes."

*On Asking Shaw to Write a Preface*

Thereafter I enjoyed intermittent contact with Shaw over a number of years. Having swallowed with undergraduate enthusiasm the whole doctrine of creative evolution and being by now a lecturer in philosophy, I conceived it to be my particular mission to give this doctrine a respectable academic background. The result of my endeavours took shape in a book which was published under the title, *Matter, Life and Value*. I was still young enough in the ways of the publishing world to think that Shaw might write a Preface for me. After all, it was *his* philosophy, or the nearest thing to it that I could manage, that I had presented in an academic setting, and he did, after all, write prefaces to other people's books and plays—witness, for example, the scarifying Preface which in 1914, when it first appeared, shocked so many nice people, that he had written to Brieux's book of plays on venereal disease and other sores in the sex life of society, or the Preface—which at this time had still to be written—to Professor Wilson's admirable, though mistitled book, *The Miraculous Birth of Language*. Why, then, shouldn't he stretch a point and do one for me? I went to call on him at Adelphi Terrace and climbed the flight of steps surmounted at the top by the famous spiked iron gate, designed, I supposed, to keep out importunate or hostile callers. Mrs. Shaw received me with her usual graciousness; Shaw talked nineteen to the dozen, and it

was some time before I had a chance to make my request.

Shaw put me off, genially but trenchantly; in fact, he improved the occasion with a little homily. The heads of the homily were, so far as I can remember: (1) that a Preface by Shaw was a commercial article of a specific financial gravity; the sum which a Shaw Preface was worth would be far beyond my or my publisher's resources. (2) The Preface would kill my book, since all the reviewers would write about his Preface and not about my text. (3) I ought to learn to make my own way and stand upon my own literary feet; he, after all, had done so: nobody wrote Prefaces for him. (4) If, when I had contrived to achieve a little reputation and made a name that people knew, I came back to him with another book, he might think about it. Having said this, he wished the book every success and was very helpful and agreeable in the matter of publishers and publishers' contracts.

The book, by the way, fell stillborn upon the public, both lay and academic. Few read it and few of those who did found anything important to say about it. The only person who concerned himself very much about it one way or the other was Shaw, to whom I sent a copy. This produced a sheaf of postcards, of which the following, portraying Shaw pacing the deck of a steamer, is a good example:

> "Hang it all, be reasonable! [I must, I suppose, have been putting leading questions to find out if Shaw had read the book.] *Brain*[1] takes ninety minutes to read. How long do you think *Matter, Life and Value* takes? I have spent months over Spengler and Pavlov, who were in on the queue long before you; and as to Keyserling, I am afraid to meet him, I am so behind. *Geduld, geduld.* I have only about ten hours a month for my reading.
>
> "You shouldn't, by the way, concede the name

[1] A play by Lionel Britten which made some stir at the time.

'scientist' to the scullion hands in the laboratory. The clerks at the observatory might as well lay exclusive claim to be *the* mathematicians."

Shaw also wrote a reasoned reply to certain criticisms which I ventured to bring against his conception of the development of the Life Force in terms of an ever more conscious awareness without any indication of what it was that the awareness was directed upon.[1] I have unfortunately lost this interesting statement by which, however, I remember to have been unconvinced.

Shortly after this, Shaw withdrew to Ayot St. Lawrence and my contacts with him grew rarer. I remember forming one of a party of four which paid him a visit from a Summer School which we were attending at Digswell Park, Welwyn. He gave us tea and a discourse on politics, but this again was a monologue rather than a conversation.

I went to Ayot on another occasion alone, dropping in on him without notice, and he was charming, breaking off his work, taking me round the garden and showing off his borders and talking to me long and earnestly on the subject of current politics. I was thinking at the time of getting myself adopted by a constituency, so that, if successful in the election, I could enter Parliament. He listened to what I had to say and then did his best to dissuade me. Some of the arguments he used appear below.

About 1935 I had a fleeting but interesting glimpse of him at St. James's Park Underground Station. Shaw, aged seventy-eight, was walking briskly down the steps to catch a train. Near the top step he slipped and slithered all the way down the flight on his back. Just as he reached the platform, recumbent, the train came in. Shaw picked himself up and, without turning round, dusting his coat, rubbing his back or betraying his consciousness that anything unusual had happened,

[1] A development of this criticism appears in Chapter VII, which deals with the Shavian philosophy. See pp. 193, 194. See also Chapter VIII, pp. 228, 229.

walked straight into the train, leaving the onlookers, who had recognised him and were rushing up to offer sympathy or help, standing looking rather foolish on the platform. Failure to waste time crying over spilt milk would, I suppose, have been his account of the episode.

*Shaw on a Political Career*

Towards the end of the last war, I was once more seriously considering the possibility of entering Parliament, and was adopted as a Labour candidate for Middlesbrough East. I had some doubts as to my suitability for the *rôle* which I was contemplating, and ventured to put them to Shaw. He was bitterly opposed to the idea, justifying his attitude with a letter written in his own hand—he was eighty-six at the time—and the proofs of a chapter from *Everybody's Political What's What*, which was just then going through the press. I give the letter in full:

"8.7.1943.

"My dear Joad,—Read the enclosed chapter on the Party System and send it back to me at your convenience.

"You must decide on the facts for yourself. Mill went into Parliament. Bradlaugh did. MacDonald did. Maxton has been there God knows how many years. Webb did. He was actually in the Cabinet, where he discovered, as Lloyd George did, that there is no such thing as a Cabinet. Belloc smelt the place and left. So did Graham Pole. Cripps went to pieces there.[1] Churchill and Ll.G. were not P.Ms. until a war forced the parties to give way to men suspected of being capable of doing something; and when the war is over and the German bayonet no longer at their throats, they will scrap Churchill as they scrapped Ll. G.,[2] and find some new *fainéant* Baldwin or Ramsay.

"It means a frightful waste of years in the degradation of electioneering, and then extinction.

[1] A bad shot this, though it *was* fired in 1943. [2] A better shot.

"However, the cards are all on the table. Play your own game. The House will soon make a pet of you for amusing it, as it makes of Maxton and A. P. Herbert.

"I have never regretted my own refusal of offered candidatures. Mostly hopeless, it is true; but one begins by contesting hopeless constituencies and leaving the safe ones to pension obsolete trade union secretaries.

"But my views are those of a too old man who ought to be dead. You are still in your prime.

"Always yours,

"G. BERNARD SHAW."

In spite of the advice contained in this letter, I decided to proceed with my candidature, and wrote to him, apologising for doing so. My decision evoked the two postcards which follow:

"13.7.1943.

"Well, I was a vestryman for a few years, and learnt a good deal from the experience. A few years in Parliament, if you can slip in without wasting five preliminary years trying, would be instructive as to How Not To Do It.

"I strongly advise you to read a book recently published by Williams and Norgate (Herbert Spencer's publishers) called *Auberon Herbert, Crusader for Liberty*, by S. Hutchinson Harris. I remember A. H. very well. He was a genuine aristo, public school, university don, progressive Conservative, Liberal M.P., finally a philosophic anarchist. His ultimate conclusions, drawn from experience of Parliament, will interest you. And he was first-rate human material, *not* an outsider."

"G. B. S."

"24.7.1943.

"Well, by all means go ahead if you want to. You will get some first-hand knowledge, which is always useful to a political philosopher.

"To be made Minister of Education, or of anything else, all you have to do is to prove (*a*) that you can make effective speeches about it without committing the Cabinet to any specific action, (*b*) that you can hold your own against the educational zealots and the Shinwells at Question Time and in debate, (*c*) that you can be depended on absolutely to do nothing else except vote as the Whips direct.

"So now you know.

G. B. S."

The reasons which led to my subsequent withdrawal do not concern this book.

I had a final postcard from Shaw, early in 1946, commenting upon an article I had written in the *Rationalist Annual* in explanation and defence of a change of view which took me from Rationalism into Christianity. The postcard was as follows:

"9.12.1945.

"I have been reading the *Rationalist Annual*.

"Is Joad also among the Apostates?

"In 1906, when I pointed to the obvious fact that the Life Force proceeds by Trial and Error, and that the world is much plagued by its superseded experiments (cobras, octopuses, etc., etc.), I got rid of Original Sin and its corollary, Old Nick, Ideal Infallible Perfection and its corollary, Old Nobodaddy, and the Problem of Evil with a single gesture. The world is a hell paved with the good intentions of the Life Force.

"But the green earth is not all pavement; and the Force still blunders its way towards godhead and holds its own with infinite possibilities in spite of atomic bombs.

"What is wrong with this? That you should relapse like Chesterton into Original Sin, or like me (at 90) into childhood! Where is the dinosaur now?

G. BERNARD SHAW."

## CHAPTER III

# SHAW'S VIEW OF TRUTH. MYSTICISM, POETRY AND MUSIC

IN THIS CHAPTER and the next I want to say something of the aspects of Shaw's genius which more particularly appealed to me. I do not wish to suggest that these are necessarily the most important aspects, although I think they will be found to include most of what is most characteristic in Shaw. I select these aspects for treatment since they were in a special and peculiar degree responsible for my feeling of affinity with Shaw, a feeling which I can best express by saying that of all great men he was to me the most congenial; his words came home to me more nearly, they set more bells ringing in my intellectual and spiritual consciousness than those of any other writer with the possible exception of Plato. Such a feeling of affinity is, I suspect, beyond reason, being in fact a matter of original, mental make-up. It involved in this case a special way of viewing things, a special way of valuing the things viewed, and a special emphasis on the need for communication and the duty of exposition with the object of inducing others to see things in the light in which one saw them oneself and to adopt one's own scale of values and disvalues. Shaw's peculiar way of viewing and valuing things, and his genius for exposition and communication are closely connected, the second following naturally from the first.

### *Shaw's View of the Nature of Truth*

In this chapter I shall be concerned with Shaw's way of viewing things which can be most succinctly stated as the conviction that truth is something which is close, clear, definite and stateable. This view of truth is responsible for a way of seeing things as sharply

etched in blacks and whites. In the world of Shaw, as in those of Swift and Voltaire, there are no half-shadows, overtones or undertones and there is no symbolism. How should there be and why need there be, if truth is something clear, close, definite and stateable?

Now, this way of conceiving truth has the advantage that you can communicate the truth that you see to others, with the consequence that, if they are men of goodwill and normal intelligence, they will see it too. For truth, conceived in this way, like murder, will "out," in the sense that it has only to be stated clearly enough, forcibly enough, frequently enough and, we may add, startlingly enough, and it will be forced upon people's notice. The corollary is then slipped in that, people's attention having been drawn to it, they will embrace it.

Pre-eminent examples of truth so conceived are mathematical and geometrical truths. Thus, if I know that the angles at the base of an isosceles triangle are equal and understand the proof of this proposition, then, provided you are prepared to listen to me, I can communicate my knowledge to you and can cause you to know not only that this fact about an isosceles triangle is a fact, but also why it is a fact. That is because the truth in question is grasped by reason and reason is common to us both, nor can the deliverance of reason, in so far as it operates upon the same subject matter and is not biased by partisanship, obscured by emotion or warped by self-interest, differ. Hence, the advantage of this way of conceiving truth is that you can communicate to others the truths that you yourself see to be true; in other words, you can make converts by process of reasoned argument.

In respect of his view of truth, Shaw belongs to a definite and recognisable category of mankind. Socrates, Voltaire, Swift, Bentham, Mill, Samuel Butler and, in our own time, Sir Norman Angell were all persuaded that you could convince men of what was in fact the

case by appealing to their reasons, and all in the strength of this belief set themselves to convert their fellows. Hence, Shaw's memorable prefaces; hence, his constant giving to the world of a piece of his mind; hence, the innumerable creeds and causes, ranging from anti-vivisectionism to the compulsory equality of income, and from vegetarianism to State Socialism, which he has preached and advocated. As Aubrey puts it in *Too True to be Good*, "I can explain anything to anybody";[1] so can Shaw; so, incidentally, I like to think, can I, which is why this particular aspect of Shaw's genius had for me a special appeal. People who take this view tend to be optimists, for the intellect is, after all, teachable; hence, if all truths are apprehensible by the intellect, there are no truths of which human beings may not ultimately become convinced, provided they are sufficiently well educated and arguments of sufficient force and persistence are addressed to them. Since most, if not all, human ills are, on this view, due to human blindness and stupidity, to failures of head rather than of heart, we may, by addressing ourselves to the head, hope to diminish and ultimately to abolish human ills and introduce the millennium. Thus, Voltaire, Swift, Bentham and Mill are all optimists in the sense that they never abandoned the belief that it was worth while both in season and out of season to urge men to make their world better, because it was not beyond the bounds of possibility that the attempt might succeed.

### *Defects of this View*

The defect of this view of truth is that, if there are truths which, though true, cannot be wholly grasped by the intellect, we shall tend to ignore them or to

[1] All the remarks which Shaw puts into Aubrey's mouth on the subject of exposition—for example, "Lucidity is one of the most precious of gifts; the gift of the teacher; the gift of explanation. I can explain anything to anybody and I love doing it. I feel I must do it if only the doctrine is beautiful and subtle and exquisitely put together"—might just as well have proceeded from his own. See further on this, Chapter VII, pp. 204, 205.

overlook them. If our attention is called to them, we shall tend to deny that they *are* truths. Further, since, on this view, any truth which the intellect can grasp can be both stated and communicated, we shall be apt to conclude that what cannot be stated or communicated either does not exist or, if it does, is not important. For since, on this view, we cannot know anything about it, we need not concern ourselves with it one way or the other. Now there is, it is obvious, an important respect in which this conclusion is false and the tendency to which it gives rise mistaken. It is false, first, in the realm of feeling.

Let us suppose that I have the toothache and wish to communicate the fact to you. Now, unless you have at some time had the toothache yourself, there will be no chord of shared experience which the words in which my communication is conveyed can set vibrating; hence my communication will be partly shorn of its meaning, since you will not know what kind of experience the phrase "having the toothache" connotes. Of course, if you have suffered *some* pain, my words will have *some* meaning, albeit a vague one, since there will be a deposit of experience, the experience of pain, common to us both, to which they can refer and which they will call up; but if you have never at any time experienced physical pain, then my words will be strictly meaningless. Now, this result follows because feelings are private and personal, so that information about truths of feeling cannot be communicated to others unless the persons to whom the communication is addressed have shared, in however faint a degree, the same feeling. So much, I think, is clear.

*Nature of Mystical Experience*

But there is another class of truths which, while akin to truths of feeling in that they cannot be communicated to those who have not shared the experiences in which the truths are grounded, do not necessarily report

only the experiences of the communicator. Truths falling into this class *may* tell us something about the universe. These are the truths of religion and, more particularly, of mystical religion. If religion is true, there is a supra-natural world and the mystic's experience may be a direct revelation of its nature. Now, it is obvious that the things appertaining to the supra-natural world, being in all respects different from the things belonging to the natural world, cannot without falsification be described in language. For language was invented and developed to convey the meanings and to describe the objects appropriate to this world. It is, in fact, most successful in describing physical things which are extended in space, less successful in describing non-physical things, such as states of mind and shades of emotion and not successful at all in describing values, such as beauty or goodness, precisely because these own an other-worldly origin.

It follows that if mysticism could give an account of itself in the sense in which the findings of the intellect can give an account of themselves, an account communicable to all-comers, whatever their personal experiences may or may not have been, it would cease to be mysticism. All that the mystic can hope to do is to convey by the language of myth and allegory some hint of those experiences for the description of which no appropriate language exists, in the hope that the hint may convey meaning to those who have some tincture, however slight, of the same kind of experience as that which the myth or allegory is seeking to convey. That is why the mystics make use of language which to the non-mystic seems manifest nonsense, speaking of "a delicious desert," "a dazzling darkness" or the "drop in the ocean" and "the ocean in the drop." It is for this reason that Plato, who realised that when we come to the edge of the findings of the intellect, we are still only at the beginning of an understanding of the cosmos, seeks by myth and allegory to convey the

nature of a reality which ordinary language is unfitted to describe.

The myth in Plato's hands is not so much a statement which is true or untrue as an acknowledgment of the existence and a recognition of the nature of a reality which transcends statements of which truth or untruth can be predicated. To quote Lowes Dickinson, Plato's myths are like "clouds of incense steaming up into the spaces of the sky from their altars which are human souls."

*Shaw's Essays in Mysticism*

Now, this kind of thing is anathema to the communicating man, whose view of truth is clear and precise. He may in theory be prepared to admit the existence of an order of reality other than the familiar world, an order whose nature can be conveyed only in the ambiguous phrases which form the stock-in-trade of mystics, and if, like Shaw, he is a dramatist, he will find it necessary from time to time to portray characters who testify not only to its existence, but to its intrusion, its all-pervasive intrusion, into everyday life—for example, Father Keegan, in *John Bull's Other Island.* But when the non-mystical, communicating dramatist finds himself confronted with the obligation to make his mystical characters talk in character, he finds for all his fluency that he has set himself a task which is so alien to his nature, that his would-be mystics are found to be expressing themselves in streams of high-toned balderdash. Just listen to Father Keegan: "In my dreams, heaven is a country where the State is the Church and the Church the people: three in one and one in three. It is a commonwealth in which work is play and play is life: three in one and one in three. It is a temple in which the priest is the worshipper and the worshipper the worshipped: three in one and one in three. It is a godhead in which all life is human and all humanity divine: three in one and one in three."

Now this, I would suggest, is just showing off, its intention being to demonstrate that Shaw, if put to it, can write in the language of the Athanasian Creed just as well as St. Athanasius himself. And in one respect, it is, indeed, like the Athanasian Creed; for much of it is strictly meaningless.

Or take Father Keegan's dialogue with the grasshopper: "If you could jump as far as a kangaroo, you couldn't jump away from your own heart and its punishment. You can only look at Heaven from here; you can't reach it."

"Why," he goes on, still addressing the grasshopper, "does the sight of Heaven wring your heart and mine, as the sight of holy wather wrings the heart o' the divil? What wickedness have you done to bring that curse on you?"

Is this, one wonders, much more than an attempt to convince us that Shaw, too, can speak the language of Bunyan and the saints?

There is a considerable amount of this sort of talk scattered up and down the plays and, except in *St. Joan*, which is a play apart, it rarely rings true. It is an exercise in dramatic technique, smacking less of the monastery or the desert than of the dramatist's workshop. And it does not, I suggest, ring true because Shaw does not really believe that it is about anything at all. Mystical talk in the mouths of Shaw's characters is a mere bombination of words, simply because he does not in his heart believe in the existence of any supernatural order to which the words could relate. His universe is all on a level, is all of a piece. Nowhere is there an opening on the unknowable, for, like Mr. Podsnap, Shaw puts the unknowable behind him.

Hence, too, as I have tried in a later chapter to show,[1] his inability to give an even remotely plausible account of the latest stage of evolutionary development, the stage in which thought has gone "as far as thought

[1] See Chapter VII, pp. 193, 194.

can reach." For what, one wonders, does thought in its ultimate development think about? Granted a different order of reality, the immaterial Forms, for example, which Plato postulated, or the Godhead of the Trinity, in which Christianity believes, there is no difficulty in postulating an object for man's fully developed consciousness, even if it be impossible to describe it. But Shaw's Ancients have apparently no recourse but the contemplation of—precisely what? We do not know, for we are never told. This contemplation admittedly thrills them—"one moment of the ecstasy of life as we live it would strike you dead," the Ancient tells the Youth—but since there is no supernatural order and since there is nothing in the natural order worthy of the Ancients' contemplation, we can only suppose that, like Aristotle's God, they contemplate themselves.

This fundamental difficulty besets the whole of the fifth play of *Back to Methuselah*. Either there is no reality other than the familiar world in which case the Ancients have nothing to contemplate, or there is. But if there is, what on earth is Shaw to say about it? The Ancients declare that they are exempted from the need to make mirrors and works of art to reflect life because they "have a direct sense of life"; they affirm that a day will come "when there will be no people, only thought" and Lilith adds at the end of *Back to Methuselah* that the universe will "become all life and no matter," a "whirlpool in pure intelligence that when the world began, was a whirlpool in pure force," but such remarks are mystical in nothing but their unintelligibility.

Descartes regarded the clear conception of the intellect as a test, sometimes as a definition, of truth. Whatever a man clearly and distinctly conceives, he said, is true. Shaw, I think, subscribes in practice, if not in theory, to a similar belief. It is for this reason that, though he might be prepared as a matter of doctrine to admit the possibility of a spiritual, which is also an incommunicable order of reality, his resources

break down when he seeks in his plays to convey its nature. For he entertains its existence, in so far as he does entertain it, as a supposition of the intellect and not as a need of the spirit; it is a concession to fair-mindedness by the head rather than the satisfaction of a demand by the heart.

I suppose that this view of truth and the attitude to mysticism which it entails are the expression of something fundamental in a man's temperamental make-up. There is a distinctive type of man who is confused by myths, bored by allegories and impatient of symbols, precisely because, for him, whatever is clearly conceivable is true and whatever is true must be statable.

Shaw is a pre-eminent example of this type. I, too, belong to it and herein, I suspect, lies the explanation of my ready submission to Shaw's influence and my almost instinctive initial agreement with so many of his views.

*And in Poetry*

Similarly with poetry. Truth being, for Shaw, something that can be clearly communicated by words, it follows that the more accurately words are used, the better. Hence, Shaw treats words as if they were scientific terms which mean exactly what they say.

Now, the purpose of words is undoubtedly to convey meaning; how else, indeed, is meaning to be conveyed? People sometimes say of a quarrel that it is only about words, and why, they proceed to ask, bother to quarrel about words? But what is the point of having words at all, if they are not important enough to quarrel over? Why should we choose one word rather than another, if there is no real difference between them. If I were to call the woman you love a chimpanzee instead of an angel, would there not *then* be a quarrel about a word? And if not by words, how, I repeat, *is* one to convey one's meaning? By waggling one's ears? So much being granted, it would seem to follow that the more precisely

the meaning intended is conveyed, the more adequately the purpose for which words are being used is fulfilled.

Now, the difficulty presented by poetry to the Shavian type of mind is that, though poetry consists inevitably of words, the poet apparently takes a different view. In poetry words often mean exactly the opposite of what they say. To quote from Chesterton's book on Shaw, "the reader supposes that he understands the word 'hide' and then finds Shelley talking of a poet hidden in the light. He has reason to believe that he understands the common word 'hung'; and then William Shakespeare, Esq., of Stratford-on-Avon, gravely assures him that the tops of the tall sea waves were hung with deafening clamours on the slippery clouds." And when he comes to contemporary poetry, in which the words all too often mean not the opposite of or something different from what they say, but precisely nothing at all, the exact-word man is not merely bewildered but exasperated. For these reasons, poetry is for people like Shaw and, I must add, myself, at best an unsatisfying, at worst an exasperating form of art. It exasperates us, for example, into performing upon it dialectical operations of which the following is a fair sample. By what criterion, we ask, is poetry to be judged? By the meaning it conveys and its effectiveness in conveying it? Or by its euphony, that is to say, by the beauty of its verbal collocations, of its diction, assonance, rhythm and rhyme; in a word, by its sound? If by the former, then in what way, we want to know, does the criterion for the valuation and assessment of poetry differ from that which is applicable to prose, seeing that poetry, like prose, is made up of words and it is the business of words to convey meaning? And why, we proceed to enquire, should it be supposed that a man succeeds in conveying some different meaning, or some extra *nuance* of the same meaning, by the simple process of putting his words into lines cut into equal or symmetrical lengths, making use of a special and often

archaic vocabulary and so ordering and arranging his words that they rhyme and carry a suggestion of lilt and rhythm? Why should it be even supposed that, where the meaning conveyed is the same, it is conveyed more effectively?

If by the latter, then poetry, we point out, is, it is obvious, only an inadequate substitute for music, for nobody could possibly deny that beautiful as the poetry of Homer, for example, or of Milton, when read aloud may *sound*, the range and scope and variety of *sound* which music can command is infinitely more beautiful. Hence, judged by the one criterion, poetry is only a kind of hobbled or constricted prose, judged by the other, it is an insipid substitute for music.

Now, this kind of surgical operation we perform, dividing poetry into its component constituents and then insisting that it be judged and condemned by the criterion applicable to each constituent taken separately, because of the *animus* we bear against poetry, being in our hearts aggrieved by it because it refuses to yield to us the riches which we know it bestows upon others.

Yet we also know as a conclusion of reason that there are such things as wholes which are more than the sums of their parts and which cannot, therefore, without falsification be analysed in this way into their separate constituents, as if they were *merely* the sum total by addition of their constituents, and that poetry is a whole of this kind. Have we not, and has not Shaw in particular, made precisely this kind of point against the not-dissimilar attempt to give an account of a living organism in terms of its component parts?

It follows from this view of poetry, which follows in its turn from Shaw's general concept of the nature of truth that, when he has to make his characters talk poetry, he is no more successful than when he has to make them talk mysticism. An outstanding example is the diction of the poet, Eugene Marchbanks, in *Candida*. Consider, for example, the following: "No, not a

scrubbing brush but a boat—a tiny shallop to sail away in, far from the world, where the marble floors are washed by the rain and dried by the sun; where the south wind dusts the beautiful green and purple carpets. Or a chariot! to carry us into the sky, where the lamps are stars, and don't need to be filled with paraffin oil every day."

I used to think this rather fine, until a sufficient number of those who understood what poetry is had assured me that it was not and pointed out why it was not.

Now I see it as a purple patch, a piece of high-falutin sentiment intruded, like Eugene's dreadful remark that he must look for "an archangel with purple wings" to be worthy of Candida, because the development of the play demands high-falutin sentiment from Marchbanks at precisely this juncture. It is the nearest thing to poetry that a man of literary and dramatic genius who understands nothing about poetry can, when put to it, contrive. I doubt if Shaw has ever spontaneously written verse in his life; I confess to a similar abstention.

*Shaw and Music*

It follows, too, naturally enough that Shaw's æsthetic sense should appear to have been wholly canalised along one channel, that of music. Indeed, he says so himself. It is customary now to say that the articles which Shaw contributed, first, to the *Star*, then to the *World* and later to the *Saturday Review* under the pseudonym of Corno Di Bassetto, are among the best things in the way of musical criticism that have been written in the English language—many would maintain that they are the best. Their great merit was that they really contrived to say something about music that consisted neither of platitudes nor of technicalities.

Now this, on reflection, one can see to be an exceedingly difficult thing to do. Music produces a great number of different effects which fall broadly into two

classes. There are, first, those effects which are also produced by life—glorified versions of life's effects, no doubt, but effects which are fundamentally of the same kind. Listening to music, you see yourself in glorious and ennobling situations, leading lost causes, rescuing maidens, entertaining the Cabinet, magnificently extending deathbed forgiveness to those who have wronged you. Or you take vengeance; or administer punishment. . . . Carried away on a sea of sound, you lose yourself in day-dreams of memory, hope or ambition, lose yourself in a word in yourself. The effect of music listened to in this way is like that of literature, because music listened to in this way is *of* this world and the things of this world. It does not introduce the hearer to another, a strictly ineffable order of reality; it rubs his nose in the familiar order, the order of love and aspiration and calculation and hope and despair in which our lives are normally lived. Hence, music so listened to introduces you, as does most literature, to yourself, revealing you to yourself either by contrast or by sympathy, albeit to a magnified version of yourself made more interesting and more glamorous by the music's power.

All music, I think, is capable of being listened to in this way, and most music, including all music that falls short of the highest class, is capable of being listened to in no other; and, of course, music which is listened to in this way can be written about and criticised and commented upon as literature can be written about and criticised and commented upon, simply because its meaning is not other than the meaning of literature, which is also the meaning of life.

Now, Shaw seems often, perhaps usually, to have listened to music in this way, if we are to accept the evidence of his famous weekly articles of musical criticism, which convey the impression that melody in general and the melody of grand opera in particular, instead of introducing him to an order of reality which

is other than and beyond the familiar world, discharged for him the office of the familiar world of colour, smell, taste and sensory gratification, as well as of the world of sound. Hesketh Pearson tells us how, when Shaw was writing *The Irrational Knot*, one of the greyest and most sordid of his works, he went to the piano and "forgot the sordid realism of his book in"—the words are Shaw's—" 'the glamorous society of Carmen and her crimson toreador and yellow dragoon.' " He assimilated even books to music, making it a vehicle for absorbing Scott and Poe and Victor Hugo physically and sensually in almost fleshly form. He avows as much in one of the articles in question:

> "In music you will find the body of and reality of that feeling which the mere novelist could only describe to you; there will come home to your senses something in which you can actually experience the candour and gallant impulse of the hero, the grace and trouble of the heroine, and the extracted emotional quintessence of their love."

and goes on to tell how music gave him the key to the understanding of literature and particularly of poetic literature:

> "I gained penetrating experiences of Victor Hugo and Schiller from Donizetti, Verdi and Beethoven; of the Bible from Handel, of Goethe from Schumann, of Beaumarchais and Molière from Mozart and of Merimée from Bizet, besides finding in Berlioz an unconscious interpreter of Edgar Allan Poe. When I was in the schoolboy adventure vein, I could range from Vincent Wallace to Meyerbeer: I could become quite maudlin over Mendelssohn and Gounod."

Shaw at least, one is glad to note, has the grace to avow that most of the music that evoked in him these literary meanings and emotions was the music of comparatively second-rate composers—of the eleven

names here mentioned, only three are those of musicians of the first rank. It is a curious fact that Shaw has never found occasion to say very much about Bach. It is rarely that the name of Bach turns up not only in those earlier musical articles, which were conditioned by the need to write easily saleable stuff about contemporary musical events, but in Shaw's mature work when he could write as he pleased.

But there is another way of listening to music, according to which music is treated not as a vehicle for arousing or communicating the emotions appropriate to life and literature, but as an end in itself. To indicate what meaning should be attached to the phrase "an end in itself" would take me far beyond the confines of this book into the realms of philosophy proper. I must, therefore, be content to take the phrase at its surface meaning, which suggests that music should be regarded as a combination of significant patterns of sound. (I must apologise for the use of the word "significant." Without the philosophical excursion from which I have just excused myself, I cannot explain the meaning I intend it to convey, and it must stand for what it is, a question-begging word carrying a suggestion of vague emotional distinction.)[1]

Viewed in this way, music arouses an emotion which is both unique and peculiar to itself. Parenthetically, it is because of the difficulty of establishing this point that those of us who are anxious to distinguish the true from what I have called the literary appreciation of music are sometimes provoked into saying that great music—for example, that of Bach—is emotionless. It isn't, of course; but the emotions it conveys are wholly *sui generis*.

### *Shaw's Misdescription of His Musical Addiction*

Now to listen to music in this way, that is to say, to listen to it as a pattern of sounds possessing æsthetic significance, is to listen to it in the only way that really

[1] I have made the excursion in philosophical books, notably in *Matter, Life and Value*, Chapter VI, and *Decadence: A Philosophical Enquiry*, Chapter VIII.

matters, nor is there the slightest doubt that Shaw himself, in common with all those who are really addicted to music—and those who care for and listen to music in the manner proper to itself can always detect their fellow lovers and distinguish them from music's casual literary admirers—frequently thinks and writes about music after this manner. Indeed, it would be impossible to explain his love of Mozart if he did not. For this reason, I think, Chesterton's account of Shaw's musical predilections is probably nearer the mark than most of the observations that Shaw has himself made about his attitude to music, of which those quoted above are fair samples.

For Chesterton, after pointing out the extremely unsatisfactory nature of poetry, consisting as it necessarily does of words, for those who, like Shaw, think of truth as something near, close and communicable, goes on to draw attention to the contrasted advantages of music:

"Here is all the same fascination and inspiration, all the same purity and plunging force as in poetry; but not requiring any verbal confession that light conceals things or that darkness can be seen in the dark. Music is mere beauty; it is beauty in the abstract, beauty in solution. It is a shapeless and liquid element of beauty, in which a man may really float, not indeed affirming the truth, but not denying it. Bernard Shaw, as I have already said, is infinitely far above all such mere mathematicians and pedantic reasoners; still his feeling is partly the same. He adores music because it cannot deal with romantic terms either in their right or their wrong sense. Music can be romantic without reminding him of Shakespeare and Walter Scott, with whom he has had personal quarrels. Music can be Catholic without reminding him verbally of the Catholic Church, which he has never seen, and is sure he does not like."

This passage describes with penetrating intuition the value which music has for men of Shaw's kind, and is, I believe, a fundamentally true description of Shaw's attitude to music. Shaw himself, however, when he writes about music, often departs from the purity of this doctrine and suggests that his chief musical pleasures are derived from indulgence in the comparatively easy emotions aroused by literary music. For this deviation—I can call it by no other name—from true musical doctrine there are, I think, three reasons.

First, professional, because he had at one time to make his living by writing about music and there is very little to say about music viewed as a combination of significant sound patterns. In order to write readably about music, you have to describe it in terms of things other than itself; you have to speak of its effects. . . . Therefore, you have to write about it in a literary way, treating all music as if it were what I have called "literary music."

Secondly, hereditary and environmental, because he inherited a tradition of grand opera and was himself brought up in an environment of melody and song. He never wholly lost the impress of this environment.

Thirdly, personal. Shaw's life has contained little of the emotional; scarcely anything of the sensuous. It has been almost entirely lacking in the sensations and the emotions that men have commonly derived from drink, from Nature and from sensual and emotional love. Shaw is, in fact, a Puritan. Therefore, he tends to find in music what men who live out more fully and variously to the full scope and range of their senses normally find in nature, in sexual relations, in the athletic pleasures of the body and the sensations of the palate. Hence, the flirtations with Meyerbeer and Donizetti; hence, the outrageous addiction to Wagner. From the need for such compensations I have, mercifully, been spared. Indeed, one of the many advantages of non-Puritanism in life is that it enables one to afford

Puritanism in music. But that the theme of this chapter may be followed to the end, I venture to put it on record that with the single exception of Shaw's *penchant* for literary, romantic music and for Wagner—if it is not inappropriate to describe Wagner as a romantic—I share all his literary and æsthetic peculiarities and disabilities.

I can make little or nothing of poetry; something, though not very much, of painting—and Shaw, too, I suspect, has opinions rather than sensibilities where pictures are concerned; while the whole of my æsthetic *libido*—for once, the psycho-analytic word really does stand for something—has flowed like his down a single channel, that of music.

## CHAPTER IV

# WEAPONS AND TOOLS

*In What Sense Shaw is a Rationalist*

TRUTH BEING CLEAR, close and communicable, the most obvious method of communication is that of exposition and demonstration. Hence, Shaw is pre-eminently a rationalist. He is not a rationalist in the sense of one who believes that everything can be proved or even understood by reason; his rationalism is confined to asserting that *some* things can be so understood and proved, and that the production of relevant facts and the employment of cogent arguments is the appropriate method of inducing understanding and establishing proof. He is a rationalist also in holding that human beings are at bottom rational in the sense that, if you demonstrate a truth and prove a proposition often enough and forcibly enough, then no amount of preconceived bias or unconscious, emotional opposition will prevent other people from recognising the truth and accepting the proposition and in the end acting upon

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what they accept and recognise, since, in the last resort, as a man thinks so will he act.

This belief in man's rationality, with its corollary that reason has power to establish and to convince, has, I suppose, been fairly general in this country in the past; indeed, the Victorians took it very much for granted. In our own time it has been widely questioned, more particularly from two points of view, that of the psycho-analyst and that of the Marxist.

*Contemporary Attacks on Reason*

According to psycho-analysis, consciousness is like a cork bobbing about on the waves of the unconscious self, its movements being largely—some would say wholly—determined by currents that run below the surface. Thought is part of consciousness. Hence, what we think, and what we take to be good reasons for what we think, are only the reflections in consciousness of the unconscious drives and wishes which cause us to think what we do and which cause the reasons for so thinking to seem to us to be good. Reason, in fact, rightly regarded, is the handmaid of desire, its function being largely confined to inventing arguments for what we instinctively wish to believe and pretexts and excuses for what we instinctively want to do.

There is, no doubt, some substance in these assertions. Man is assuredly less reasonable than the Victorians thought or pretended to think him; but equally he is not so irrational as psycho-analysis in general and the Freudians in particular make him out to be. Inevitably, the reaction has gone too far.

The other point of view from which the belief in man's rationality is currently questioned is that of Marxism. According to this doctrine, what a man thinks about morals, politics, philosophy and religion is determined not by his reason, but by the particular stage of economic development reached by his society and by the particular economic class to which he

belongs in that society. Hence, though our convictions may grow up with the consent of our reasons, they are not formed by our reasons. For reason is not free, but is suborned from the first, its deliverances being determined by the particular method adopted by the society to which the individual belongs for satisfying its basic needs for food, warmth and shelter.

Now, in this view too there is substance. Our opinions, more particularly our political and ethical opinions, are, as we can now clearly see, far more influenced by our period, our society and our class than the nineteenth century allowed. But, once again, the reaction has gone too far.

*Power of Ideas*

I mention these doctrines here because they serve to throw into high relief the degree to which Shaw in his own thinking and writing repudiates them. He has, no doubt, at different times let drop haphazard remarks derogatory to reason, but his vitalist philosophy, his life's work and—what concerns us in this chapter—the particular method which he has chosen for the pursuit of that work, entail that the doctrines of psycho-analysis and Marxism, in so far as they assert that men's actions are never guided by the power of disinterested reason, are false. For his work is based upon the assumption that if it is sufficiently ventilated, truth, like murder, will "out," whatever the stumbling blocks to its acceptance in the way of frustrated *libido* or economic class, which lie below the threshold of consciousness. Now, the accepted instruments for the spreading of truth are fact and argument. Thus, the writer who wishes to convince his readers of truths he conceives them to ignore will seek to accumulate facts, to set them out in the most convincing, the most attractive or the most startling way and then to derive from them arguments designed to support the conclusions to which they point.

Now, that the arguments will convince and the

conclusions be embraced presupposes that men are rational in the sense in which I have defined "rational". And it is in precisely this sense that Shaw may be said to belong to the great rationalist tradition. He believes that to change men's opinions, you must appeal to their higher or, if the phrase be preferred, their more lately evolved faculties; that the springs of human nature are to be found, not in the abdomen, or in the genitals, or in D. H. Lawrence's "dark blood stream," or in the unconscious or in any of the other bogies by which twentieth-century irrationalists have tried to frighten us out of our confidence in the free and unfettered employment of our reasons, but in the reason and the will. He further believes that if men's reasons are convinced, then their wills will tend to impel them to take the actions which are appropriate to their convictions. In all this I am saying no more than that Shaw believes in the power of ideas but, owing to the disrepute into which the doctrine that ideas can influence men's actions has fallen, I have found it necessary to explain with this degree of particularity what "the power of ideas" means.

Nor, if I may permit myself the expression of a personal opinion, which Shaw, I feel, would have endorsed, can the power of ideas, as here defined, be denied. It is clearly false to suggest that the ideas which lay behind the French Revolution played *no* part in determining its outbreak or in guiding its course, or that the ideas of Christ or Mahomet about how men should live have played no part in changing their modes of living. In no sphere, perhaps, does the student find more impressive verification of the power of the idea, not only to persist, but in the end to prevail than in the victory which the claim to think freely has gained over dogmatic religion. To trace the slow history of French free thought from its springs in the Renaissance through Rabelais and Montaigne, thence to the Libertins and Bayle and from them to its full flowering in Holbach and Diderot and Voltaire, is to realise the extent of the power which

ideas exercise over men's minds. On the one side was all that authority could muster to suppress and destroy with the weapons of exile, imprisonment, torture and death; on the other, there was only the power of the idea. Yet in the last resort the idea prevailed, though only for a time, for the victories of the mind have to be won afresh in every age.

Nor are the changes which thought brings about negligible. Again and again they have profoundly affected man's way of living and on the whole affected it for the better; indeed, it is the hope of bettering man's life and his societies that has inspired almost every system of philosophy which has concerned itself with human conduct and institutions. Nor is it possible to doubt that such a hope originally inspired Shaw.

*Shaw's Style*

The tools of Shaw's trade, the weapons in his armoury, may most appropriately be regarded from this point of view; they are, that is to say, tools of argument and weapons of assertion designed to produce conviction. First and foremost among them is the weapon of style. It is now customary to praise Shaw's style and to acclaim him one of the greatest masters of English prose, but when I first began to read Shaw very little had been said about his style. Certainly I had read nothing to explain the curious effect of heady exhilaration that it produced and still produces in me, for all the world as if it were a draught of intellectual champagne. Since then Shaw's style has been often and intensively analysed, so that one is in a better position to see how the trick was done. I will say something, first, about the character of the style and, secondly, about the way in which it fulfilled its creator's intentions.

Shaw himself has told us that his style—he generalises the statement to apply to the nature of all styles that really *are* styles—is an instrument of assertion. "A true, original style," he writes, "is never achieved for its

own sake. . . . Effectiveness of assertion is the Alpha and Omega of style. He who has nothing to assert has no style and can have none; he who has something to assert will go as far in power of style as its momentousness and his conviction will carry him. Disprove his assertion after it is made, yet its style remains."

The description applies admirably to the writing of Shaw himself who is, first and foremost, a master of effective assertion. His smiting directness, his wit, his resourcefulness in illustration, his command of metaphor and simile, no less than his power of marshalling fact and ordering argument, make him a superb pamphleteer. His style braces the emotions and rivets the attention. The reader catches the writer's enormous self-confidence, as he finds himself assisted along the dry paths of assertion and argument by the administration of carefully calculated doses of amusement and shock. His critical faculties having been dazed and drugged, the reader's mind takes in the assertions without perceiving that it is doing so.

Now, it will be seen from the definition of style quoted above that the effectiveness of Shaw's writing depends, in his view, entirely on the fact that he has something important to say. Officially, he affects to despise style as such and echoes the sentiments of Samuel Butler, who wrote in the *Notebooks*:

> "I never knew a writer yet who took the smallest pains with his style and was at the same time readable. . . . A man may, and ought to take a great deal of pains to write clearly, tersely and euphemistically . . . he will be at great pains to see that he does not repeat himself, to arrange his matter in the way that shall best enable the reader to master it, to cut out superfluous words and, even more, to eschew irrelevant matter, but in each case he will be thinking not of his own style, but of his reader's convenience.
>
> "Men like Newman and R. L. Stevenson seem to

> have taken pains to acquire what they called a style as a preliminary measure—as something that they had to form before their writings could be of any value. I should like to put it on record that I never took the smallest pains with my style, have never thought about it, and do not know or want to know whether it is a style at all or whether it is not, as I believe and hope, just common, simple straight-forwardness."

Butler, writing before the days of the typewriter, adds characteristically that it is not good style so much as good handwriting that is important to the writer. "I have," he says, "taken all the pains that I had patience to endure in the improvement of my handwriting (which, by the way, has a constant tendency to assume feral characteristics), and also with my MS. generally to keep it clean and legible."

Now, both Shaw and Butler are here stating what, no doubt, is an important truth—namely, that what chiefly matters is what a writer has to say and not how he says it, the wares he brings to market and not the vehicle in which they are carried. Nevertheless, in stating this truth, they have themselves "effectively asserted" to the point of exaggeration, for there is not the slightest doubt that, unless Shaw wrote so well, he would not have been able to assert so effectively. There is also no doubt that the power to assert effectively is only one, even if it is the most important, of the elements which go to the constitution of a good style, including Shaw's own style.

(The truth of the matter is, of course, that in the last resort it is not possible without falsification to separate what is said from the way in which it is said and then to consider them apart as discrete elements contributing separately to a total effect. Each is, in fact, an inseparable part of a complex whole, and when they are taken out of the whole in which they are initially given and considered in isolation, they are literally different from

what they were as elements of the whole to which they originally belonged. This truth is recognised in the most celebrated of all remarks about style, a remark which represents the opposite pole of exaggeration from that of Shaw, namely, "the style is the man.")

*The Device of Speed*

And, in Shaw's case, there are, it is obvious, other elements in the total effect or, rather, there is one other element to which all the rest are subordinated, namely, speed. Shaw's prose has an almost physical forcibleness at the level of ordinary, direct man-to-man speech. It is, indeed, the supreme example in English letters of a style which is at once a writing and a speaking style; a style which can be used as effectively for the one as for the other mode of communication. It was, I imagine, first perfected on the political platform—a cold-drawn, highly-tempered instrument of expression, built for cut-and-thrust conflict and designed to fulfil every platform emergency that its maker's imagination could foresee, Its chief effects upon the hearer or the reader are those of imperturbability and drive. Here, one feels, is a force nothing can upset, nothing deflect and nothing stop, and to this end every ancillary charm or grace of diction has been ruthlessly threshed out of it.

Epithets, for example, are almost entirely excluded. There is a deliberate choice of flat, colourless words. What are the words that come to one's mind when one thinks of a typical Shavian utterance? "Incorrigible," "mendacious," "irremediable," "mischievous," "inveterate," "pertinacious." Shaw likes to use abstract nouns like "celibacy," "degeneracy," "pugnacity," "apostasy," precisely because they are colourless.

Meanwhile, a stylistic contrivance is elaborated whereby a number of separate statements are conveyed in the form of relative clauses so skilfully interlocked into the whole that the joints escape notice. Here is an early example from *The Irrational Knot*:

> "Mr. Reginald Harrington Lind, at the outset of his career, had no object in life save that of getting through it as easily as possible; and this he understood so little how to achieve that he suffered himself to be married at the age of nineteen to a Lancashire cotton-spinner's heiress. She bore him three children, and then eloped with a professor of spiritualism, who deserted her on the eve of her fourth confinement, in the course of which she caught scarlet fever and died. Her child survived, but was sent to a baby farm, and starved to death in the usual manner."

Here clause has been fitted into clause so ingeniously that never a joint can be seen, so that a sentence made up of many separate items lies as level as a spear and streaks past, as though it were launched with a single lunge. Note how the crowded middle sentence, telescoping, as it does, four travails, two tragedies and a comic professor of spiritualism, produces an effect of imperturbable audacity which nearly takes one's breath away.

Or take the following from the Epilogue to *Pygmalion*—it is, in fact, the first sentence of the Epilogue:

> "The rest of the story . . . would hardly need telling if our imaginations were not so enfeebled by their lazy dependence on the ready-mades and reach-me-downs of the rag-shop in which Romance keeps its stock of 'happy endings' to misfit all stories. . . ."

The sentence incorporates the following separate statements:

(1) Most readers are addicted to romance.
(2) This enfeebles them.
(3) It does so by maintaining and retailing a number of stock endings which the writer does not invent to fit the occasion, but keeps ready made and doles out as the occasion requires.
(4) These are always "happy endings."
(5) In life "happy endings" rarely occur.

(6) Therefore, a story which terminates with a stock, romantic "happy ending" is untrue to, "misfits," life.

But the reader's mind is so bemused by the sheer pace and drive of Shaw's utterance that it does not tumble to the fact that these separate statements are being made. For at the very moment when it seems to be discarding contemptuously all the familiar aids to effective writing, such as grace of diction and ornateness of expression, the style is, in fact, dizzying the reader with the ecstasy of pace. Shaw stripped his sentences of those trailing wreaths and ropes of metaphor that Ruskin wound round his message and then multiplied still further the effect of impetuousness thus produced by using all the energy that might have gone to the making of the garlands, to accelerating the pace and so intoxicating the reader with the thrill of sheer speed. The effect of a product of the Shavian workshop was to drug the critical sense no less effectively than the highly-coloured stylistic utterances that were emanating at about the same time from the rooms of Brasenose College, Oxford, the word-fancying laboratory at Boxhill or from Samoa's coral strand.[1] And just as the beauty of an athlete is more effective than that of an æsthete, so the style grows more sensuous, the more austere it becomes, practising a physical seduction even when it seems to rely wholly on pure intelligence.

I give one more example:

> "One can see . . . that our present system of imperial aggression, in which, under pretext of exploration and colonisation, the flag follows the filibuster and trade follows the flag, with the missionary bringing up the rear, must collapse when the control of our military forces passes from the capitalist classes to the people;

[1] I must apologise for this literary allusiveness. All this talk about style has gone to the head of my pen; but just in case there may be a reader here and there who does not tumble to my meaning, I believe myself to be referring to Pater, Meredith and Stevenson.

that the disappearance of a variety of classes with a variety of what are now ridiculously called 'public opinions' will be accompanied by the welding of society into one class with a public opinion of inconceivable weight; that this public opinion will make it for the first time possible effectively to control the population; that the economic independence of women and the supplanting of the head of the household by the individual as the recognised unit of the State, will materially alter the status of children and the utility of the institution of the family; and that the inevitable reconstitution of the State Church on a democratic basis may, for example, open up the possibility of the election of an avowed freethinker like Mr. John Morley or Mr. Bradlaugh to the Deanery of Westminster."

Once again, we have a series of separate statements so ingeniously socketed together that the sentences seem to go whipping through the semi-colons much as telegraph wires do through their posts, when you watch them rush past the windows of the train. The effect is torrential. Lightened of all adjectives, nimble with nouns, turning categories into keyboards when it wants to ripple a run, and avoiding vowels in order to obtain the snap of consonants, Shaw's style rattles at a rate that makes the pace of Swift seem slow. Meanwhile, though colour and grace have been ruthlessly discarded, balance and rhythm, rapidity and economy, aptness of simile, felicity of illustration and an exquisite timing and adjustment of parts have been carefully cultivated, so that while one supposes one's senses to be vigilant and alert, they have, in fact, been lulled and dazed. And just when the watchdogs of the critical faculties have been drugged by the intoxication of speed and one's defences are down, Shaw's meaning enters and establishes itself in the citadel of the mind. Hence, Shaw's style, deliberately cold and colourless as he

made it is, in fact, a verbal weapon of deadly power producing in the reader a numbing effect analogous to that produced upon the body by the sting of pelting hail. And just as a body which has been exposed to a shower of hail glows with tingling warmth, so the mind of a patient recovering from Shavian literary treatment glows with the warmth of complacent self-satisfaction. And herein, I suppose, lay the secret of Shaw's power over young men such as myself. He brought us to a condition of such intellectual exhilaration that we were like men intoxicated, so that, when we were in our Shavian cups, we did not realise that we were being injected with Shavian doctrines or, if we did, we were too happy and receptive to protest.

*On Feeling Superior*

In myself the chief effect of this exhilaration was to bring on a fit of intellectual priggishness. I would rise from my reading of Shaw, or come away from one of his plays, suffused with a sublime consciousness of ineffable superiority. What fools most people were! How imbecile their conversation! How contemptible their conventions! How childish their intellectual pastimes! Shaw had recognised them for what they were and exposed them; but only spirits akin to his own, of whom, by God's grace, I who had submitted to his intellectual embraces and been taken into his intellectual confidence was one, could share in the recognition and savour to the full the joy of exposure. As I laughed with him at the follies he derided and the pretensions he exposed, I could assure myself that Shaw had not given me a new insight, but had only made articulate an insight I already possessed, bringing into the focus of consciousness something that I had always known but had not the wit to realise that I knew. Hence Shaw's superiority was less in originality of insight than in conscious awareness. Where I knew, he knew that he knew and had used his superior powers

of expressiveness and communication to reveal to me the content of my own intuitive consciousness. His function, then was not, I realised, so much that of a creator as of a midwife; and with the realisation came the conviction that I was not after all a being so very different from Shaw.

Thus, in sharing Shaw's insight, I shared, too, the superiority which the insight conferred. Admittedly, he had the advantage of me in respect of the comparatively minor accomplishments of articulateness and expressiveness. He also happened rather irrelevantly to be a dramatist—from which grudging avowal you may gauge the extent of my self-intoxication.

I am not, of course, presuming to defend these intellectual excesses. I mention them merely to indicate how heady were the draughts that I drank at the Shavian spring, heady enough to put me beside myself with conceit. Now, the most potent single ingredient in that intoxicating intellectual brew was Shaw's style.

*The Orator*

It seems natural to proceed from Shaw the writer to Shaw the orator because, as I have already pointed out, his style in writing and his style in speaking are not two different styles but are one and the same. Transcribe a Shavian speech and it reads like a piece of Shavian prose; in fact, as Hesketh Pearson has told us, Shaw was a public speaker before he was a writer and the prose style was no more than an application to paper of the manner which had been cultivated on the platform.

I have heard a number of great speakers in my life. As a young man, I heard Lloyd George. I have heard Churchill and Aneurin Bevan, who are the best of contemporary political speakers. Of non-political speakers, I have heard Annie Besant and Maude Royden, both of them remarkable platform performers and endowed with voices which gave their lightest words a moving quality. I have also heard great actors. But I

have never listened to a speaker who was so regularly effective as Shaw. I have heard Shaw make many speeches, on platforms at big meetings, as a lecturer to academic audiences and as a fellow Fabian talking informally to comparatively small gatherings at Fabian Summer Schools. Never once have I heard him make a bad speech; never once did he fail to seize my attention at the beginning and to hold it to the end.

The effect he produced was partly due to his beautiful speaking voice with its melodious intonation and athletic articulation, which enabled him without raising it to make himself easily audible in the largest halls. But of this I have already written. Partly it was due to his continuously interesting matter—Shaw was never dull; he was amusing, brilliant, often startling—partly, to his gift for apt simile and felicitous illustration.

*Gift of Illustration*

Take, for example, his illustration from the rule of the road of the need for law in a community. Law is necessary, Shaw pointed out, in regard to a substantial area of human conduct which is ethically neutral in the sense that it does not in the least matter what people do, provided that they all do the same thing. It is a matter of ethical indifference whether the traffic goes on the right- or the left-hand side of the road; it is, however, enormously important, if the rule is that the traffic should go on the left, that nobody should think himself entitled by invoking some alleged principle of personal freedom or individual self-development, still less by appealing to some putative right of free access to any part of the king's highway, to endanger his own life and everybody else's by walking or driving on the right.

Or take his illustration of the case for free travel on the railways. It is as reasonable, I have heard him say, to expect the lorry-driver, the rim of whose wheel accentuates a depression in the publicly owned highway

by a fraction of an inch, to defray the cost of its repair, as to expect the traveller to defray the cost of the wear and tear to the publicly owned railway occasioned by the circumstance of his travelling on it.

Such illustrations gave to his speeches the vivid quality of surprise. You never knew what was coming next. I remember, for example, hearing him speak at a meeting held to consider a proposal to utilise the South Kensington site for a National Theatre. Most of the audience had, of course, come to hear Shaw, whose name appeared last on the list of speakers. The first two speakers were long. The third was intolerably long; the minutes dragged by as he prosed boringly on, until platitude had succeeded platitude for the best part of an hour. The audience grew palpably restless, but still waited for Shaw. When at last his turn came, he strode jauntily as ever to the edge of the platform: "Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "the subject is not exhausted, but the audience is" and sat down again.

*Power of Argument and Repartee*

And what a way he had with hecklers! One speech which I heard him deliver was subjected to continual interruption by a man who raucously shouted his irrelevant and usually unintelligible remarks from the gallery. After this had been going on for some time, Shaw paused, looked benignly in the direction of the interrupter and said with an air of great blandness: "If the gentleman in the gallery will forgive me for interrupting him, I should like to point out . . ." The audience roared with delighted laughter.

This ability to think quickly and to bring up on the spot, as it were, the relevant fact, the appropriate illustration or the telling repartee was one of the major elements in Shaw's effectiveness as a speaker and debater. It was also one of the facets of his genius that made a particular appeal to myself. Not of wealth or power or virtue was I ambitious; I desired merely to

be possessed of a similar self-confidence, to be imbued with a similar quickness of thought and power of expression, to be in command of a similar readiness and felicity of speech. There can be few men in the long history of controversy who, when the debate was over, have so rarely gone home to their beds metaphorically kicking themselves with exasperation because they did not think of that telling reply, that apt illustration, that damaging fact, that irrefutable demonstration *at the time*. When one adds to all this the charm of Shaw's voice, his superb self-confidence, the compelling or surprising character of the considerations which he adduced, his capacious memory for facts, his power of marshalling and lucidly expounding the facts he remembered, let alone the jaunty stride, the upright stance, the twinkling eye, the telling gesture, the total effect was, in my case at least, overwhelming.

I would believe anything that Shaw said, even if he said that the sun went round the earth—an announcement, which, in point of fact, I did hear him once make and proceed to support with the most ingenious arguments.

Shaw, indeed, was constantly making some startling statement, as, for example, that every many over forty was a scoundrel, that vegetarians were the best boxers, or that woman invented man for the sole purpose of impregnating her, and then overwhelming the incredulity with which it was greeted with an apparently unanswerable array of astronomical, anthropological, medical or biological facts. "When astronomers tell me," he says somewhere, "that a star is so far off that its light takes a thousand years to reach us, the magnitude of the lie seems to me inartistic." The average listener, first staggered by the impudence and then amused by the obvious innocence of such a remark, would proceed to adduce the familiar considerations which will be found in any textbook of physics or astronomy, even, it may be, remembering a few facts with which to back

them, hoping with his up-to-date knowledge to laugh Shaw's ignorance out of court, only to be discomfited by a Shavian come-back which, exhibiting an unmistakable acquaintance with all the considerations that had seemed to *him* conclusive, went on to produce an array of further considerations, backed by carefully enumerated statistics and orderly deployed facts, which certainly *seemed* to suggest that the initial announcement, so far from being naïvely foolish, as his opponent had suggested, was, in fact, an exposition of obvious truth.

It is, no doubt, true that Shavian announcements of this type were rather designed as dialectical exercises to shock people and make them think, than presented as serious arguments. They partook of the nature of displays, as an expert swordsman will indulge himself in a few ornamental flourishes to show his mastery of his weapon. Yet rating them no higher than this, I must put it on record that none of the manifestations of Shaw's genius gave me greater pleasure or aroused in me a greater desire of emulation.

Shaw's strategy of deliberate and audacious exaggeration won my admiration, because he had the technique to "get away" with it. His calculated irresponsibilities of statement excited me, because he had the skill to make them prevail, or to seem momentarily to prevail over the sober but all too familiar considerations which, had the assertions been made by anybody else, would have overwhelmingly refuted them. But Shaw seemed to be able to ride roughshod over such considerations. Oh, to acquire an equal skill, to achieve a similar readiness, to master a similar technique, and then I, too, would make the intellectual dullards and sobersides look foolish, whatever array of fact and argument they marshalled in their support.

It is also true that, as a very old man, Shaw has committed himself to statements of fact which are quite simply and strictly untrue, for example, in the preface to *Geneva, Cymbeline Refinished and Good King*

*Charles*, the statement that most people with property to leave never bother to make a will; or that during the worst bombardments of the last war the daily average of English people who were killed in air-raids varied between ten and fifteen. . . . But such mis-statements proceeded from a very old man, whose life-long habit of defensible exaggeration had run away with him. They are not essential elements of the Shavian dialectic and they were in no sense necessary adjuncts to its effective employment, when Shaw was at the height of his powers.

*Shavian Dialectic*

Since this dialectic played so large a part in the evocation of my early hero-worship of Shaw, I propose to give a brief account of it, dwelling in particular upon the characteristic features of what might be called serious Shavian argument as distinguished from effervescent Shavian squibs.

As I have already hinted, serious Shavian argument was almost always unexpected argument, designed to throw you off your intellectual feet by the shock of surprise.

For example, Shaw early entered the lists on behalf of the feminist cause and advocated the granting of equal educational, social and political rights to both sexes. It was commonly urged against this proposal that women could not fairly claim equal privileges and rights with men, since women bore a smaller burden in the community than men did or, if the burden were not smaller, it was at least less dangerous. For women, after all, were not soldiers. (This, of course, was before the days of the W.A.A.Cs. and the A.T.S.; it was also before civilians had entered the firing line.) Instead of saying, as he might have done, that women also risked their lives in childbirth, or that you could not measure a citizen's worth to society solely by the standard of the risks he ran on its behalf, Shaw pointed out that women had often been soldiers in the past and that in

all the wars worth fighting in, that is to say, in all revolutionary wars, they had manned the barricades and fought side by side with men. He bade his opponents reflect, for example, on the part played by women in the French Revolution. Or take—to quote an example cited by Chesterton—Shaw's argument for phonetic spelling, of which he has been a consistent advocate. The ordinary arguments for phonetic spelling are that children and foreigners will find it easier to learn and that its use will, therefore, facilitate the adoption of English as an international language. The chief argument against it is that it will make English dull and lifeless and outrage literary sensibilities nourished on the language of Milton and Shakespeare.

Shaw, eschewing the obvious arguments *for*, countered the argument *against* by pointing out that Shakespeare himself believed in phonetic spelling, since he spelt his name in six different ways. To spell English phonetically is, in fact, to spell it in the way in which it has historically been spelt before English became stereotyped into lifelessness, and the demand for phonetic spelling is essentially a demand for a return to the flexibility and variety of the traditional orthography of Elizabethan and Jacobean English. "That," Chesterton comments, "has the great fighting value of being an unexpected argument; it takes the other pugilist's breath away for an important instant." Or take the argument for Home Rule employed by the English valet, Hodson, in *John Bull's Other Island* against Matthew Haffigan. Hodson's reason for demanding Home Rule for the Irish is that he wants "a little attention paid to my own country; and thet'll never be as long as your chaps are 'ollerin' at Westminister as if nowbody mettered but your own bloomin' selves."

In the same category I would place Shaw's constant insistence upon the fact that he is a man of genius. "Do you now begin to understand, O Henry Arthur Jones," he wrote in a letter to his brother dramatist,

Henry Jones, at a time when his own plays were still complete failures, "that you have to deal with a man who habitually thinks of himself as one of the greatest geniuses of all time?" Such a statement belongs to the same breath-taking category as the arguments. For a minute—but that is the all important minute—one has nothing to reply, because one is robbed of one's breath by the audacity of the attack.

As, perhaps, the best sustained example of the Shavian trick of unexpectedness known to me, I take leave to quote from Mr. Hesketh Pearson's book an extract from a letter which Shaw wrote to the *Daily News* in connection with the controversy which raged over Voronoff's monkey gland treatment, which was alleged to rejuvenate ageing people. A certain Dr. Bach had written denouncing the treatment as dangerous because it might reproduce certain characteristics of the ape, notably his cruelty and sensuality, in the persons operated upon or in their children.

Shaw's letter, which was signed "Consul Junior," Consul being a famous performing ape, and addressed from the Monkey House, Regent's Park, ran as follows:

"Has any ape," the writer asked, "ever torn the glands from a living man to graft them upon another ape for the sake of a brief and unnatural extension of that ape's life? Was Torquemada an ape? Were the Inquisition and the Star Chamber monkey-houses? Were 'Luke's iron crown and Damien's bed of steel' the work of apes? Has it been necessary to found a Society for the Protection of Ape Children, as it has been for the protection of human children? Was the late war a war of apes or of men? Was poison gas a simian or a human invention? How can Dr. Bach mention the word cruelty in the presence of an ape without blushing? We, who have our brains burnt out ruthlessly in human scientists' laboratories, are reproached for cruelty by a human scientist!" After asserting that "vaccination and anti-toxin inoculation have given to men neither the

virtues of the cow nor the qualities of the horse," Consul Junior concluded: "Man remains what he has always been, the cruellest of all the animals, and the most elaborately and fiendishly sensual. Let him presume no further on this grotesque resemblance to us; he will remain what he is in spite of all Dr. Voronoff's efforts to make a respectable ape of him."

I hesitate to give as a final example General Burgoyne's reply in *The Devil's Disciple* to Richard Dudgeon's plea that he should be shot rather than hanged, because it belongs to the category of repartee rather than to that of argument. I do, however, include it here not only because it constitutes one of the most brilliant examples of Shaw's wit, but because it shares with what I have called his serious arguments the outstanding quality of surprise. Its unexpectedness, like that of the arguments, takes the audience's breath away, so that, when the play is performed, there is always an appreciable pause before the laughter comes. "Now, there," says General Burgoyne when the plea to be shot is made, "there, you speak like a civilian. Have you formed any conception of the condition of marksmanship in the British Army?"

I do not know of any remark in Shavian literature which has given me a greater thrill of momentary pleasure.

*Wit in the Restoration Dramatists*

Of his wit much has been written, and I have little to add. A large part of its effect depends upon precisely the qualities I have been enumerating, upon the power of apt illustration and of ready repartee, upon the quick and surprising argument. Yet Shaw is not a wit in the sense in which the word was used in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He is not even a wit in the Wildean sense. For the Restoration dramatists and the writers of the 'nineties, wit was essentially an ornament; it was something tacked on to the actual content of the writing to give it amusement value

It was a sauce added to an insipid dish to make it piquant. For the intellectual content of these writers *is* insipid. In the Restoration dramatists, what passes for thought consists almost exclusively of a discourse upon and description of the methods by which old men can seduce young women and penniless young men can secure fortunes with their wives. The themes are frailty in women, lust in men and rapacity in all.

In the writers of the 'nineties, there is high-toned talk about art, about personal development, about savouring experiences like wine and playing upon the senses as if they were Æolian harps. In so far as the æsthetic writers of the 'nineties had a philosophy, it may be described as an exaggerated individualism which maintained that the development and expression of the self without a care for others or a thought for society were the ends of life—not, in point of fact, a very different philosophy from that of the Restoration dramatists, except that the forms of self-expression recommended by the 'nineties were at once vaguer and more catholic than those recognised by the writers of the Restoration.

The point I am trying to make is that in these writers, precisely because the thought was not deep, the wit did not flow naturally from it, but had to be tacked on to it, as it were, from outside. If the thought was not sufficiently deep, the feeling was not sufficiently bitter to overflow naturally into the sarcasm and irony which form so large a part of satire. These men wrote, not because they had something to say that seemed to them supremely and convincingly right, but because it seemed right to say something.

It was inevitable in the circumstances that the manner of what was said should come to seem more important than the matter. If you have no construction of substance to decorate, you will presently set about constructing a decoration, whence it is but a step to the invention of a construction for the sake of decorating it. And this is

the predominant impression that one derives from Restoration wit.

"He is a fool that marries, but a greater that does not marry a fool."

"But affectation makes not a woman more odious to them" (i.e. to men) "than virtue." "Because your virtue is your greatest affectation, madam!"

"Denying that she had done favours with more impudence than she could grant 'em."

> "*Women are like tricks by sleight of hand*
> *Which, to admire, we should not understand.*"

It is pretty evident in these examples that the sense has been sacrificed to the expression, a sacrifice which is the easier made since the sense is not very much. So Lord Chesterfield speaks of wits who prefer "the turn to the truth," a preference which is neither difficult nor surprising when the truth is trivial or small. (With Sheridan, of course, the case was different; Sheridan had on occasion something of importance to say; Sheridan also had feeling. With Swift the case was very different; Swift had bitter feeling.)

The content of most of the Wildean epigrams turns out on examination to be little more substantial. "The proper basis of marriage is a mutual misunderstanding." "The only way to get rid of a temptation is to yield to it." "We live in an age when unnecessary things are our only necessities"—what are these but straightforward inversions of accepted maxims? They are platitudes turned upside down, tropes on their "night out." The chief purpose of remarks of this kind is entertainment; they please the intellectual sense and titillate the mental palate.

*Shavian Wit*

But the Shavian aphorism or epigram does not merely please and titillate; it moves and excites because it is no more than the pointed conclusion of thought which has already convinced. Shaw's wit is not a mere ornament

tacked on to a negligible structure of thought; it is the very bones and sinews of the thought, deriving less from the felicities of apt verbal collocation, than from the logical process of thought seeking expression. It is the movement of that thought or, rather, it is the conclusion to which the movement drives. Thus, if the word "epigram" be interpreted in the strict sense, Shaw made few epigrams. I possess a book of aphorisms and epigrams entitled *A Treasury of English Aphorisms*, collected by Logan Pearsall Smith. In it, Shaw appears on only ten pages as compared with the one hundred and thirty-three pages which contain examples of Dr. Johnson's aphoristic or epigrammatic utterances.

The essential feature of Shaw's aphorisms is indicated by the title he gave to the collection he made of them at the end of *Man and Superman*; it is *The Revolutionists' Handbook.* The contents are pellets of thought rather than diamonds of wit. Each pellet can be unwrapped and its contents developed. Consider, for example, "He who can does; he who cannot, teaches." Its meaning, developed in the Preface to *Misalliance*, is that the teaching profession in this country is usually embraced as a second best. Englishmen are by nature men of action; their natural mode of self-expression is to play games, engage in field sports, explore deserts, climb mountains or open up undeveloped territories. Failing these direct forms of self-expression they start businesses and make money, or become executives or administrators and achieve power. It is only when and in so far as they find themselves frustrated or prove themselves to be incompetent in regard to these, their natural spheres of activity, that they take to teaching, just as schoolboys, by and large, tend to be good at their books only when they are bad at their games.

Or take, "Home is the girl's prison and the woman's workhouse." It is simply a pointed statement of Shaw's conviction that the position of women in Victorian England was intolerably restricted, because they were

tied to their homes. Why is the home the girl's prison? Because, at the time when the statement was made, she could not earn her living in factory or office. Why, the woman's workhouse? Because nobody had ever troubled to invent labour-saving devices to make the performance of household routines as quick and easy as it has become in twentieth-century America.

Or consider the implications of "Do not do unto others as you would that they should do unto you. Their tastes may not be the same," or, in the same vein, "The golden rule is that there are no golden rules." Such remarks are straightforward applications of the Shavian philosophy of Creative Evolution, according to which every human being is an individual expression or objectification of the Life Force, which has created him as an instrument for facilitating the process of its own development. Every individual, then, is an experiment with the right of an experiment to develop along its own lines. Hence, "the vilest abortionist is he who attempts to mould a child's character."

Now, it follows directly from this conception of the nature and status of the individual that it is impossible to lay down general rules for the wise conduct of the individual's life. There is no universal end, as Plato and Aristotle, for example, maintained, at which all men should aim and from the obligation to pursue which, general rules of conduct applicable to all may be derived; or, rather, the universal end is that each should develop in his own way—that is to say, conformably with the promptings of the Life Force which is using him as its instrument of its expression. This is to erect the common saying, "One man's meat is another man's poison," into a universal principle, the principle, namely, that you should not "do unto others as you would that they should do unto you."

The remark that "greatness is only one of the sensations of littleness" is also directly derivable from Shaw's theory of evolutionary development.

*Shavian Exaggeration*

Now, nobody, least of all Shaw, would contend that these remarks are literally and strictly true. It is, of course, obvious that some people teach because they have a vocation for teaching and not because they are unfit to do anything else. It would be absurd to say of such people that they cannot act in some sense in which a business-man, say, can act. It is equally obvious that many women and girls were going out to work even at the time when Shaw denounced the home as a workhouse for the former and a prison for the latter, while, since he made it, the falsity of the remark has become glaring.

Again, it is clear that when all allowance is made for the need for self-expression and the right of every individual to develop along his own lines and to realise all that he has it in him to be, some lives are better than others and some tastes are better than others. It seems to follow that we should seek to live those lives and to cultivate those tastes that are better. Moreover, rules can be laid down for developing capacities and realising ambitions so that, given two men with the same capacities and the same ambitions, one of them who follows the rules will develop the former more fully and realise the latter more successfully than the other who neglects them.

In this sense it may be said that there *are* golden rules. Thus, it is a golden rule that one should keep one's promise and pay one's debts, even if one adds to it some qualifying phrase such as "in general" or "on the whole." It is a golden rule that one should be just to other people and kind to animals. More consistently, perhaps, than any other writer Shaw has campaigned against the maltreatment of animals in the alleged interests of science; what is more, in the course of conducting this campaign he has elevated the maxim that animals are ends in themselves and not merely means to man's convenience into a principle which

approaches as nearly to "a golden rule" as makes no matter.

Judged by any strict standard of truth, these do not deserve to be ranked as truths at all; they are rather exaggerated half-truths, over-emphatic assertions of one side of a complex truth. Shaw himself makes no bones about avowing the fact. His writings are confessedly didactic. He writes to give the world a piece of his mind, to quicken men's wits and to improve their intelligences. Now, the object of moral instruction is not, as he has pointed out, "to be rational, scientific, exact, proof against controversy, even credible; its object is to make children good."

But if this object is to be achieved, the children must, first, attend; and how is their attention to be secured unless they are first made to sit up? Hence, the over-emphatic statement of half-truths! As Shaw himself pointed out, unless you exaggerate an ignored half-truth to the point at which it poses as a truth startling enough to shock people out of their complacency, they will continue to ignore it. In his *Essay on Liberty*, John Stuart Mill adduces this consideration in support of his plea for the complete tolerance of novel and shocking opinions. A novel opinion, he points out, is usually partly true and partly false in which event it shares truth with the commonly received opinion. This means, of course, that the accepted opinion itself only embodies one aspect of the truth and the novel opinion will almost certainly stress that aspect of the truth which the accepted opinion fails to embody. Thus, one-sided popular truth will be supplemented by one-sided novel truth. In such a situation, while both partial truths may justly claim the right of popular ventilation, the novel minority opinion has a special right to be heard, since this is the one "which for the time being represents the neglected interest."

The impact of one-sided Shavian truths in morals and politics upon the equally one-sided truths of late

Victorian religious orthodoxy, moral prudery and economic individualism, affords a good illustration of Mill's contention. And here, as it seems to me, we come within sight of the true interpretation of Shaw's wit. Shaw is never witty for the sake of being witty. Indeed, he passionately denies that he *is* witty. As Chesterton remarks, "he will say something which Voltaire might envy and then declare that he got it all out of a Blue Book." And the reason, Chesterton suggests, is that to make jokes, epigrams and aphorisms for the sake of making them, has no interest for Shaw. Art for its own sake offends him as a form of intellectual self-indulgence. He coins epigrams and points witticisms, as he exaggerates half-truths, because they startle the listener and ensure his attention. His attention to what? To pieces of the Shavian mind on morals, politics, philosophy or whatever may be the theme at the moment. They are the sauce which he serves with the pieces to make them appetising.

One other characteristic of Shaw's methods deserves mention—their impersonality. Dogmas, doctrines, policies, institutions, committees, societies, the middle classes, business men, doctors—all these he has attacked remorselessly; but persons, never.

I suppose that no man has punctured more currently accepted beliefs and discredited more popular ideals than Shaw; yet no social critic has made fewer enemies. In the first World War his pamphlet, *Commonsense about the War*, made him one of the most unpopular men in England. He was cut by his friends, asked to resign from clubs and societies and publicly insulted in the street. So great was his unpopularity that assaults upon his person were apprehended, with the result that the famous *chevaux de frise* made its appearance at the top of Shaw's staircase in Adelphi Terrace.

But it was Shaw's opinions, and in particular his advocacy of an alliance between France, England and Germany, that created the fuss, not their author. Nor,

when Shaw was personally insulted by old friends, did he retaliate in kind. He laughed the whole thing off with that nonchalant blandness which had disarmed so many hostile audiences. This impersonal, non-particularising benevolence constituted in Shaw's public contacts and controversies one of his most admirable traits, just as in private intercourse, where he scarcely seemed to be aware of the individual personality of the man to whom he was talking, it was his most disconcerting. It was as if he did not take people seriously enough to be put out by their impertinences, just as he did not deem them important enough to be at pains to notice the difference between them.

Commenting upon this impersonal strain in Shaw, Chesterton notices, I think rightly, the curious combination of the most intense humanitarianism with an "absence of feeling for or interest in individual animals."

> "He would waste himself to a white-haired shadow to save a shark in an aquarium from inconvenience or to add any little comforts to the life of a carrion-crow. He would defy any laws or lose any friends to show mercy to the humblest beast or the most hidden bird. Yet I cannot recall in the whole of his works or in the whole of his conversation a single word of any tenderness or intimacy with any bird or beast."

In this respect, as in so many others, his attitude was at the opposite end of the scale from the feminine with its everlasting interest in and emphasis upon the precise difference between Tom and Dick and Joe, and the eternal preoccupation with "yourself" and "myself" and the relations between us.

His arguments were also unfeminine in that they were never *ad hominem*; any one of them might have been addressed to anybody. "State, state, state" was his motto, no matter to whom you are making the statement and irrespective of his attitude to yourself. Your

confidence in the force of the idea, the logic of the fact and the truth of the conclusion will carry the day.

I once had a lesson from Shaw in the art of controversy; its emphasis was laid precisely on this point. Whatever personal points may be scored against yourself and however damaging their effect, you must, he taught, always resist the temptation to hit back with personal points in your turn. They inflame the emotions, darken counsel and increase the difficulty of establishing a conclusion and making a convert. I early accepted this as a counsel of perfection, lamentably inadequate as my attempts have been to carry it out.

I learnt a controversial lesson of equal importance from that other great Fabian, Sidney Webb. 'In argument,' he urged, 'concede whatever you can. Make this acknowledgment, surrender that point, yield, in fact, all the outworks and bastions of your position, provided always that you preserve the essential thing that matters, the pearl beyond price of your conviction. *That* must never be surrendered. But the more you give up of the rest, the easier you will find it to hold to the thing that matters.'

Let me here emphasise that this acknowledgment of Shaw's magnanimity and benevolence is in no sense a personal discovery. The fact that nobody ever hit harder than Shaw, yet wounded less, that nobody, in fact, was ever less "inclined to wound" or "afraid to strike," has been noted again and again by others. Gilbert Murray, for example, tells us that "with all his wit and satire I never heard Shaw say a spiteful thing or bear personal malice after a battle. People have said that he never made a man his friend until he could laugh at him; true, perhaps; but there was no malice in the laughter."

Shaw had already convinced my head; it was his magnanimity that warmed my heart.

## CHAPTER V

# THE PLAYS

### I

THIRTY YEARS HAVE PASSED since I saw my first Shaw play. The ideas are familiar, the themes date, yet for me, the magic still holds. I am still left gasping at the glittering craftsmanship with which Shaw carries his characters triumphantly over the shallows of argument where others, less gifted, run aground. I am still dazzled by the brilliance of the wit and exhilarated by the drive of the thought. Even on the films—not, one would have thought, the ideal medium for the give and take of rapid dialogue—the magic holds. Such plays as *Major Barbara* and *Pygmalion* which in recent years have been shown on the screens of central London came to me thirty-five years after their first appearance as fresh as daisies, daisies, moreover, which planted in one world have grown into another. For all that, this, I fear, will be an inadequate chapter. I am not a dramatic critic and I have little to say about the plays which has not been said many times. I excuse myself by pointing out that most of what there is to be said has been said many times.

*Criticism of the Characters*

The criticisms in particular have been made many times. There is, for example, the criticism of the alleged inhumanity of Shaw's characters. None of the characters, we are told, are individual people existing in their own right; they are merely representations of different aspects of Shaw, records for the playing of Shavian themes, spouts through which pour the streams of Shavian doctrine. The statement that all Shaw's characters voice the opinions of their author in the sense in which it is true is a truism; of course, everything that a character says comes out of his creator's mind. But the

falsity of the charge that the characters are not individual people with authentic personalities but only gramophone records can be demonstrated by merely citing such names as Dick Dudgeon, Lady Cicely Waynflete, Louis Dubedat, Candida, St. Joan or Captain Shotover, who are most indubitably characters in their own right. One remembers them as individual persons just as one remembers people in Dickens or in Shakespeare and after a time one knows the kind of thing that it is "in character" for them to say; one even feels that one might recognise them in the street.

Yet the charge has some relevance to the characters in the later plays who, it must be admitted, are shadowy.

*Criticism on the Ground of Lack of Action*

There is the charge that the plays lack action and are, in effect, no more than dramatic dialogues. This again, I think, has substance in relation to the later plays; but even here it seems reasonable to answer, if the dramatic dialogue is good enough, what of it? There is something faintly vulgar about the alteration of the position of pieces of matter in space—which is, after all, what action is. Aristotle's God, it will be remembered, though the source of movement, does not himself move. For my part, provided that the flow of ideas is well enough maintained, the bouts of intellectual swordsmanship between the characters sufficiently dazzling, the wit sufficiently amusing, I can dispense with the murders which do duty for action in most melodramas and the whisperings and gigglings in corridors followed by the slamming of bedroom doors which typify the action of the average farce. When it is not vulgar, much contemporary dramatic action is pointless. Many dramatists seem unable to tolerate the thought of their characters standing or sitting still. Every sentence must be punctuated by the ringing of a telephone, the offering of a light, a cigarette or an ashtray, or the pouring out of a drink. If I had my way, I would make it compulsory

for every contemporary dramatist and actor to sit through the Hell scene in *Man and Superman* once a year and to observe the skill with which Shaw keeps our attention riveted for well over an hour on the conversation of four persons who remain for the most part absolutely still. What a relief from the fidgets of the contemporary stage, where one is sometimes tempted to think that all the characters have St. Vitus's dance.

More pertinent, perhaps, is the charge that Shaw does, indeed, invent action—and violent action at that—which does not spring naturally from the development of the plot or the characters, but is arbitrarily introduced to keep the play moving. The aeroplane descent in *Misalliance*, the bomb droppings and explosion at the end of *Heartbreak House*, the pursuit of Hotchkiss in *Getting Married* by Mrs. George with a poker are examples of such arbitrarily intruded action. I think there is substance in this charge. One sometimes gets the impression that Shaw has said to himself, 'I must be careful to remember that this is a play which has to be performed on the stage, not a university lecture, or a conversation-piece in a drawing room. Now, a play is distinguished from a lecture or a conversation-piece by reason of the fact that a play contains action; besides talking the characters *do* things and things are done to them. It is a long time now since these characters of mine did or suffered anything. They have just been sitting here talking. Very well, then, I will make something happen! I will cause an aeroplane or a bomb to descend upon them from the skies; this will jolly them up and stop them talking for a bit or at least it will cause them to talk about something different!'

But since Shaw is not very interested in action, he cannot bring himself, at any rate in his less successful plays, to take the trouble to devise action that develops naturally from the characters or is a logical outcome of the situation. And so we get arbitrary and sporadic outbreaks of violence by burglars and bombs and

aeroplanes which seem unconvincing, precisely because they bear so little relation to the general structure of the play. From my own experience, I would hazard the view that the effect produced on the audience which tends to see in these incidents merely another Shavian joke, is not what Shaw intended; the audience insists on laughing when Shaw wants it to feel startled.

Nor I think do they convince Shaw himself, for in general, he seems to be too bored with these arbitrary happenings to think them worth following up and quickly lets his characters forget all about them. For a moment the characters are, indeed, jollied up. They rush about, have hysterics, make impracticable suggestions; they may even be a little hurt, but the action into which they have been "jollied" lasts only for a moment or two. Hardly have they had time to get their breath, when they are found to be sitting about again and talking, as if nothing had happened. The complaint against Shaw on the score of action is, then, not that his plays lack it, but that their action is arbitrary and convulsive; it does not spring naturally from or resolve itself into the organic structure of the play.

*Shaw's Own Lack of Interest in the Plays*

And the reason at bottom is, I suspect, that Shaw is not himself really interested in his plays which are in the nature of afterthoughts or, at least, appendages to his first thoughts, a circumstance which, if I am right in my surmise, affords me a further excuse for saying comparatively little about them. For if the plays are not important to Shaw, I need not defend myself for saying that they are at least not *so* important as are many other aspects of his work to me. Shaw's interests lie pre-eminently in morals, politics and philosophy. He is, in fact, a philosopher in precisely the sense in which Plato was a philosopher—a philosopher, moreover, who possesses, as did Plato, a strong dramatic gift. This gift he deliberately uses to bring his ideas on

human life and how it should be lived and on human communities and how they should be run to the notice of people who would not read strictly philosophical works, presenting them so entertainingly and startlingly that audiences who *saw* the plays would remember either through pleasure or from shock the ideas which had been brought so forcibly to their notice.

The straight Shavian doctrine is contained in the prefaces. It is often unpopular doctrine which is bound to strike most people as untrue or subversive; it is, in fact, a spoonful of medicinal moral powder and like most powders is disagreeable. The plays which follow perform the office of a concealing jam; being sweet and palatable, the jam is eagerly partaken of and the powder, scarcely noticed, is swallowed in the process.

Here is Shaw's own statement of his purpose as a playwright:

> "I am no ordinary playwright. I am a specialist in immoral and heretical plays. My reputation was gained by my persistent struggle to force the public to reconsider its morals. I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinion on sexual and social matters. I have no other incentive to write plays, as I am not dependent on it for my livelihood."

In this sense, the preface is "the thing" by which to catch the conscience of the public and the play is the vehicle by which "the thing" is conveyed. Thus, *Mrs. Warren's Profession* is designed to draw the attention of the public to the facts relating to the use of brothels and to awaken its social conscience by their dramatic presentation. Broadly, two points are made. First, given the existing organisation of society, many fortunes and perhaps most businesses, when their roots are uncovered, are found to spring from and to profit by somebody's degradation and vice. Therefore, their holders have a vested interest in degradation and vice.

Consider, for example, the nature of the properties from whose rents a considerable proportion of Church income is derived. . . .

Secondly, men being what they are and the marriage system being what it is, the prostitution of some women is the price that must be paid for the pre-marital chastity of most. (This, of course, is no longer true, since the proportion of women who are chaste before marriage is so much smaller than it was when Shaw wrote the play, that prostitution is a rapidly declining profession.)

The play was banned by the Censor. Shaw reacted vigorously and carried the war into the Censor's camp by accusing him of licensing plays which encouraged immorality by presenting its attractions, whilst banning plays which discouraged it by presenting its social implications and physical consequences.

Shaw's brilliant assault upon the censorship, in the course of which he beat this surviving eighteenth-century official right out of the controversial field, clearly demonstrated where his interest lay. It was not the play that concerned him, but the doctrines which he had set out in the preface, of which the play was merely a dramatic illustration. His subsequent defence of *The Showing Up of Blanco Posnet*, which was also banned by the Censor, confirms this view. Similarly, *The Apple Cart* and *On The Rocks* are projections on to the stage of his growing dissatisfaction with the workings and results of political democracy, the reasons for which are set out in *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism* and *Everybody's Political What's What*. *Getting Married* is a dramatic presentation of his criticism of the marriage system on the ground that it saddles the right to have a child with the obligation to live with and look after a man, and *Major Barbara*, of his criticism of the capitalist social and economic system, which seeks to reconcile the many to the poverty which is a necessary condition of its own successful functioning, by representing poverty as a source of moral virtue in the present and a

guarantee of heavenly reward in the hereafter, while at the same time mitigating its worst effects, blunting its revolutionary edge and satisfying its own guilty conscience by the practice and patronage of charity.

To the generalisation that the plays are dramatic appendages of the prefaces three qualifications must be made.

*Qualifications and Reservations*

(1) First, the dramatic presentation is sometimes so effective as to obscure the burden of the message it enshrines. This was the case with *Man and Superman*, of which Shaw wrote later in the preface to *Back to Methuselah*:

> "Being then at the height of my invention and comedic talent, I decorated it" (the doctrine) "too brilliantly and lavishly. I surrounded it with a comedy of which it formed only one act and that act was so episodical . . . that the comedy could be detached and played by itself. . . . The effect was so vertiginous that nobody noticed the new religion in the centre of the intellectual whirlpool."

The famous Hell scene is, indeed, an unashamedly static conversation between characters designed to ventilate and elucidate certain ideas. But, as Shaw points out, the managers checkmated him by omitting the scene from the presentation of the play. Shaw subsequently did his best to make good the omission by developing the same ideas in *Back to Methuselah*.

(2) There are some plays which are exceptions to the generalisation that the plays are no more than appendages to the thought of the prefaces, notably *Heartbreak House* and *St. Joan*. *Heartbreak House* seems to have been written in a mood of discouragement engendered during the 1914-18 war, when Shaw, having no particular doctrine to preach and no specific to offer, set himself to write a play in the Chekov manner on the theme of futility. *St. Joan* is in a class by itself. For once, the artist took control of the philosopher and

insisted that Shaw's dramatic should take precedence of his preaching talent and be exercised in its own right and for its own legitimate purpose, as though its exercise were an end in itself. (It is, I think, no accident, that I, who delighted in the didactic preacher and reformer, should regard *Heartbreak House* as one of the least satisfactory, because one of the least didactic, of Shaw's plays. Also, while I can see how good *St. Joan* is, I don't get from it the peculiar and distinctive delight for which I have grown accustomed to look to Shaw. It is, perhaps, for the same reason that what I may call the non-specialised Shavian lovers—that is to say, those who care for the drama rather than for the Shavian philosophy—have united to declare *St. Joan* Shaw's greatest play.) Trifles like *How He Lied to Her Husband*, *The Inca of Perusalem* and *Great Catherine* may also be placed in the category of non-didactic plays, although the first, which deliberately turns upside down a number of commonplace sexual situations, may be construed as a shot fired in Shaw's anti-romantic campaign.

(3) In the third place, Shaw's doctrinal drive seems towards the end of his life to have failed no less than his dramatic power, with the result that some of the later plays, for example, *Geneva*, *In Good King Charles's Golden Days* and *The Millionairess* are, in fact, conversation-pieces and nothing more. The conversation is still extremely good; it is written with great gusto and can be read and heard with enormous enjoyment. But these are no more plays than Plato's dialogues are plays; there is no plot, there are practically no incidents and the characters are less human beings than abstractions, consisting only of so much of a man as is necessary to fill the *rôle* of mouth-piece for a particular point of view.

### *The Mature Artist's Indifference to Form*

The feeling for and interest in form often seems to evaporate in the later work of great men. Plato's later dialogues, notably *The Laws*, are markedly inferior in

dramatic interest to his earlier work. The thought now is everything; the dramatic medium through which it had formerly been presented which Plato had used with deliberate artistry to make his ideas palatable has been allowed to lapse into insignificance. In Beethoven's last quartets the composer seems again and again to break through the mould of form and to voyage in a world of pure sound. I have read that a similar tendency is observable in Shakespeare's last plays. It is as if towards the close of his life the great artist can no longer command the patience to perform the tricks of the art that he has employed so often and known how to employ so well and surrenders himself wholly to the demands of his subject matter, having lost the interest in his audience which formerly impelled him to present the subject matter in the most attractive way. Or, again, it is as if a man who had laboriously climbed the rungs of a ladder, on reaching the top kicked over the ladder by which he had mounted.

Shaw's latest work is, as it seems to me, in similar case. Whether the failure in dramatic form is involuntary or whether Shaw had, in fact, grown indifferent to anything but the content of the ideas to whose exposition his dramatic art had formerly been harnessed, I do not know. Probably there is some truth in both explanations. Shaw, towards the end of his career, was a tired man who could no longer hold together in a single unity the varied elements which had formerly gone to the making of that effective dramatic confection, the Shaw play. But he was also an indifferent man, too contemptuous of his fellows to care either to win their agreement to his opinions or to titillate their dramatic appetites by his art.

I have sometimes been tempted to wonder whether a certain puerility which expresses itself in the schoolboy jokes, the outrageous puns and the knockabout farces of the later plays—for example, in *The Simpleton of the Unexpected Isles*—may not have been adopted as a kind of mask to conceal from the audience Shaw's contempt for

them and to protect Shaw himself against the recurrence of the lifelong misunderstandings which had provoked it. The world had for so long treated Shaw as a licensed jester that presently he took the world at its word and gave it the jests that it had grown to expect, jests which no longer served the office of a cunningly compounded bait on the hook of doctrine, but were indulged in for their own sake. For in the last plays there is little or no presentation of doctrine; there is only conversation about ideas.

II

*General Effect of the Plays*

So much having been said in belittlement of the importance of Shaw's plays in comparison with other aspects of his work, I can proceed to make frank avowal of my unabashed delight in them.

I have enjoyed Shaw's plays more than those of any other playwright, and, as I said at the beginning, the magic still holds. I not only enjoy the plays at the time of seeing, I come away from them with a sense of heightened consciousness, as if my spiritual and intellectual being had been raised to a higher potential of energy. Some few breaths of the winds of Shaw's own exuberant vitality have blown through me. The effect is twofold. First, there is an effect of intoxication which makes ordinary people seem more than usually dull and ordinary and myself more than usually lively and exhilarated. With what pity I look down upon the frivolity of the attitude I impute to the rest of the audience which can treat Shaw merely as a comic writer who succeeds in being more or less funny, and at the dullness of mind which fails to recognise a new gospel presented with all the force of an inspired evangelist. How superior is Shaw, who can show me ordinary folk for what they are, poor intellects, dull clods, conventional automata. How superior, too, am I, who can share to the full in his vision and can see them

even as he has shown them to me. For I am not like that—not at all!

Secondly, there is a bracing effect. My intellectual nerves are tautened, my spiritual perceptions refined. I see more beauty, more amusement, more scope for my interest and observation in the world than I saw before. Also I am more conscious of my own laziness, indolence and self-indulgence; more resentful of them and more capable of coping with and overcoming them.

At a moment of acute personal depression induced by a misfortune that numbed and dazed, it happened that I saw *You Never Can Tell*, saw it as a man of fifty-six for perhaps the fourth or fifth time in my life.

During the first act my mood withstood the play and numb depression prevailed. Then with the appearance of William, the introduction of Crampton to his wife and children, followed by the luncheon party on the terrace, cheerfulness began to break in. In the last act I was laughing out loud with happy amusement. Nor did the tonic effect of this play evaporate. I came away braced and invigorated, ashamed of myself for my mood of heaviness and helplessness, with the courage to face the world and the strength to go through with whatever might lie before me. In a word, the effect of the play was precisely the effect claimed for religion; in making me a serener, it made me a better and a happier man. Now, this that Shaw did for me is a great thing for one man to do for another, and I wish to make handsome avowal of my gratitude. Others, I do not doubt, could say the same. Hats off, then, to Shaw for producing the effect classically ascribed to great drama, purging me of fear and sending me out into the world better equipped to cope with its problems.

*Content of the Plays*

By what means does Shaw produce this moral—it is, I think, the appropriate epithet—effect? Omitting the more obvious ones, the play of ideas, the quick wit, the

rattle of the repartee, the surprises and dénouements, I emphasise a characteristic which was, I think, the chief instrument of my own particular pleasure—the plays are about something, something that matters. The problem of *The Doctor's Dilemma* is a real problem. If you can save only one man, do you choose an ordinary decent chap, upright and reliable but mediocre, or an amoral egotist whose genius alone saves him from being a commonplace cad? One does not know. As in those schoolboy arguments about whether, as the ship goes down, you should save the baby or the "old master," the wife or the mother, there is much to be said on either side. . . .

The temptation of Ferrovius in *Androcles and the Lion* is a real temptation. When it comes to the point, the old Adam gets the mastery, banishes his Christian principles and impels him to use his strong right arm to scatter his enemies. The practicability of the doctrine of non-resistance is called in question and with it the validity of the claim of Christian principles to govern men and bring peace to the world.

The disillusionment of Major Barbara, when she discovers that her own independent position is derived from Undershaft's cannon factory and that the Salvation Army can be bought by Bodgers's Whiskey, and of St. Joan, when she finds that her voices have misled her and that God has "let her down," are real disillusionments. The idealists are made to realise the power of the world. How pervading is the apathy, how irresistible the wickedness which either bring their ideals to naught or suffers them to succeed only at the cost of cheapening and degrading in the process! Is this, one is left to wonder, a final verdict upon all idealists?

The plight of the characters in *Too True to be Good*, who are left without a creed to focus their aspirations or a code to guide their steps, is a real plight. It represents the condition of great masses of people in the Western world, which is, Shaw suggests, the historic

condition of members of a decaying civilisation. Is there, one wonders, no remedy for their plight save the dawn of a new spiritual revelation? But can man be spiritually born again, until his civilisation has destroyed itself and been replaced by another?

The point I am trying to bring out is that these problems and difficulties, these dilemmas and disillusions, are precisely those with which contemporary man is faced. They come home to all of us because they are interwoven with the stuff of our day-to-day experience; more precisely, they came home to me because they were concerned with the problems which were visibly presented in the lives of my contemporaries and acutely felt in my own. It is in this sense that, I insist, Shaw's plays are "about something"; they start with the supreme advantage that their subject matter is intensely interesting.

*Sexual Preoccupations of the Contemporary Drama*

My demand that a play should be "about something" is qualified by the proviso that it should be about something other than the relations between the sexes. This proviso is, of course, not satisfied in the case of 90 per cent. of the novels, stories, plays and films that go by the name of literature and drama in the contemporary Anglo-Saxon world. So far as the films are concerned, over 95 per cent. at a conservative estimate proceed upon the assumptions that the only possible motive for male action is to obtain possession of the person of a sexually attractive female; the only possible motive for female action to display sexual attractiveness preferably in untoward circumstances, as, for example, in huts, shanties, convents, prisons, caravans, deserts, ships that are sinking, towns that are being bombed, in penury, vagabondage, espionage, or undress before an array of competing males among whom natural selection is relied upon to eliminate all but the bravest, strongest or richest, as the case may be, and the only possible

subject of interest to the average audience to see the males and females competing and displaying. In support of this generalisation, I would ask the reader to observe the advertisements of films that appear on the hoardings of any large town of England or America, which almost invariably register two vast faces, one male, the other female, either kissing, having kissed, or being about to kiss.

One may sum up these tendencies by saying that most popular art proceeds upon the assumption that most audiences and readers consist of sex-starved adolescents having the interests appropriate to persons in that condition.

I hope that it will not set the reader against me on the score of priggishness, if I aver that I do not share these interests or do not share them to anything like the degree that the appeal of popular art presupposes. I do not mean, of course, that I am not interested in sex; what I do mean is that I am not interested in the literature and drama of sex to the exclusion of the literature and drama of ambition, politics, psychological guilt or social problems. In a word, I am not interested in sex at second hand.

When a man gets to my time of life—and here, I venture to think, the principle I am asserting holds, or should hold, good for all adult persons—sex should be enjoyed, not talked about, or sublimated, or elucidated, or portrayed with the infinite *longueurs* of a moral and artistic convention, which permits the playwright to show and the writer to describe everything but the thing itself. For by the time one has reached middle age, one has learnt most of what there is to learn about the permutations and combinations of the different strands that may be interwoven in the complex relationships between men and women. If one has not acquired this knowledge, one ought to have done so, and the practical inexperience and resultant interests and curiosities of the middle-aged literary and dramatic sex addict are evidence of a misspent youth.

The point I am making is that the relations between men and women are not an adequate subject for the prolonged contemplation of a mature intelligence. Imagine Plato, for example, being diverted by a bedroom farce, Aristotle listening with pleasure to a sentimental song, or Leonardo being thrilled by a strip-tease act. The supposition has only to be entertained for its falsity to become apparent.

The current presupposition as to the overwhelming importance of sex generates as its by-product an exaggerated emphasis on the importance of women. It is not so much that sex is women's special preserve, as that over-emphasis upon its persistence and pervasiveness as a motive throws into high relief those aspects of men's activities and concerns which relate to women. It substitutes for the general range of men's interests, political, social, moral, religious, literary, scientific, sporting and business, the interest of money, the interest of a career, the interest of a hobby or a collection, one particular set—the set, namely, which concerns his relations with women and then proceeds upon the assumption that this set of interests is co-terminous with the whole. Hence, arises the fiction that women are the most important influence in a man's life expressing itself in such themes as the choice between love and honour, such dilemmas as whether to choose the girl or the career and such slogans as "the world well lost for love."

Now, one of the things that most delighted me in Shaw was his sturdy repudiation of this sexual presupposition in regard to man's interests and the motivation of his actions.

*Women and Adventurers*

In the preface to *Man and Superman* he discourses contemptuously on the romantic adoration of women, exhibiting it as a particular and particularly pernicious example of the romantic attitude to life against which his whole career as thinker and playwright had been a

protest. The female is, for him, the stronger sex, in the sense that woman's instincts are more compelling, their wills more determined, their sense of reality more vivid, precisely because they are the vehicles of a more direct expression of the force of life than are men.[1] Woman unscrupulously exploits the bait of sexual attractiveness with which life has endowed her in order to catch the male and then proceeds to take the originality and adventurousness out of him, that she may reduce him to the status of breadwinner for herself and her children. Now, the type of man with whom she fails in this endeavour is the adventuring, pioneering type; the explorer, the inventor, the conqueror, or the filibuster in the world of action; the original thinker, reformer or artist in the world of the mind and the spirit. The originator or innovator in any sphere is, according to the tenets of the Shavian philosophy,[2] an instrument specially created by the Life Force to raise the vital consciousness of our species to new levels of experience and awareness, while it is the woman's function to conserve and maintain it at the level which has already been reached. Hence alone among males the innovators and originators are the channels of a vital thrust or impulsion no less direct than that which animates the average woman and enables her to prevail over the average man.

Now, it is precisely for this type of man that woman is not the exclusively dominating motive. He is a great lover, but love is for him a holiday and woman essentially a plaything, to be taken up during the intervals between the real business of life, but not to be allowed to divert attention when serious work is afoot. Off he goes to climb Mount Everest, to explore the Amazon jungle, to split the atom, to plan and fight the campaign, to make the great speech, write the great book, compose the great symphony, paint the great picture. While the

[1] See further on this, Chapter VII, pp. 186–188.

[2] I have developed this view of the originator in the general account of the Shavian philosophy contained in Chapter VII. See pp. 188–191.

adventurous or inspirational fit is on him, he has neither time nor use for women; when it is exhausted and his work is done, he comes back to them, his eyes alight with desire, the most exciting and exacting of lovers. But the woman is a fool who takes the most exciting of lovers for her husband, for presently he will be off again or, if he is caught and hobbled at home, will be turned by his sense of frustration into a bored and sullen prisoner.

But as he insists, or, rather, as the Life Force working in and through him leads him to insist on following his vision or his bent, instead of doing conventional work for which the world is prepared to pay him in conformity with the artistic conventions of the time, he makes a poor breadwinner. There is neither demand nor honour for his work and when he is too old to work any more, no patron, body or institution is prepared to pension or to maintain him. What official body was ever known to pension an adventurer?

For all these reasons, men of first-rate originality and ability, whatever the sphere in which their talents are displayed, tend to make bad husbands, while first-rate work in any department of human activity has rarely if ever been undertaken with the desire to please women or to earn money for them and their children. Still less have women inspired it.

Speaking generally, it is only to the lives of second-rate men that *cherchez la femme* is an even approximately accurate key, and in such men a dramatist of Shaw's calibre has little interest.

*Ne Cherchez pas la Femme*

The foregoing is, I hope, sound Shavian doctrine. At any rate, I believe myself to have learned it from Shaw. Not only is it stated explicitly in the preface to *Man and Superman* and emphasised in the Hell scene, but it is implicit in many of the plays. For my part, sickened by sentimentality, bored by most women, resentful of

their assumption of an importance in my life which either they did not possess, or which, as I believed, it would be better if they did not possess, I took all this *au pied de la lettre* and incorporated it into my everyday working philosophy.

I am attempting by this digression to give substance to my statement that the attraction of Shaw's plays consisted, for me, in their being *about* something, by stressing their negative merit of *not* being exclusively about the relations between men and women and of *not* portraying men dominated by women. On the contrary, the general tendency of the plays is to deliver a more or less continuous snub to the woman's assumption that she is the guiding *motif* in male activity, that daring and wonderful things are done for her.

There was Dick Dudgeon, for example, in *The Devil's Disciple*, who carefully tells the woman who supposes him to be in love with her that he is not in love with her but, that he, nevertheless, proposes to sacrifice himself upon the scaffold when he need not have done so. The woman, of course, cannot understand this and the question very naturally arises in the minds of the conventionally trained audience, if he is not going to die for love of her, what on earth is he going to die for?

There is no clear answer to this question, unless we fall back upon Shavian philosophy and say that the Life Force impels him to sacrifice himself for an ideal, the ideal of honour or of disinterested self sacrifice. It is almost as if, once he has performed his function of raising the consciousness of life to a level at which it can become aware of and be influenced by impersonal ideals, life has no further use for him.

But the point and delight of *The Devil's Disciple* lies not so much in the reasons for which Dudgeon sacrificed himself as in the reason for which he did not sacrifice himself. Here was a man doing the sort of thing which hundreds of novelists have represented men doing for the love of women ever since novels began to be written

and then carefully explaining that the woman has no effect upon his decision one way or the other.

Similarly, in *Cæsar and Cleopatra*, Cæsar's decision to leave Egypt has no more to do with Cleopatra than his decision to come to Egypt. Shaw represents Cleopatra as taking the conventional view of the power of women over men and as consequently surprised and affronted at Cæsar's apparent indifference both in the Lighthouse scene in Act III and in the Palace scene in Act IV, when Cæsar forgets all about her:

> CLEOPATRA (*rising from her seat, where she has been quite neglected all this time and stretching out her hands timidly to him*): Cæsar!
>
> CÆSAR (*turning*): Eh?
>
> CLEOPATRA: Have you forgotten me?
>
> CÆSAR (*indulgently*): I am busy now, my child. Busy. When I return your affairs shall be settled. Farewell; and be good and patient.
>
> [*He goes, preoccupied and quite indifferent. She stands with clenched fists in speechless rage and humiliation.*]

At the end of the play, when about to depart for Rome, Cæsar again forgets her: "Ah! I knew there was something," he says when she brings herself to his notice.

It is true that Cæsar is represented (*a*) as an ageing man who has outgrown his interest in women—Cleopatra hails him at their first meeting as "old gentleman!"—(*b*) and as a great man who is immune from most of the follies and weaknesses to which most ordinary men are prone. It will be remembered that as he leaves her he promises to send to Cleopatra just such an ordinary man.

The moral is clear; it is only in the lives of men who are both common and ordinary that Shaw is prepared to recognise the woman *motif* as playing a dominating part. The degree to which a man rises above his fellows to the level of the creative painter, poet or musician,

of the original thinker in philosophy, science, morals or politics, or of the adventurer, explorer or pioneer in the world of action is in inverse ratio to the power of women over his life and actions.

The same moral emerges from *Pygmalion*. It is not Higgins, the original thinker and artist, whom Elizabeth marries, but the nice silly-ass Freddy. There is a double moral here. First, there is a repetition of the lesson to which I have already drawn attention; Higgins does not carry out his linguistic experiment because of an interest in Eliza, but because of an interest in the job—that is to say, in the thing itself. When the job is done, having no further use for her, he drops her. She reacts in the first instance as Cleopatra reacts to Cæsar's treatment—that is to say, she is hurt and humiliated on finding that she has no influence over Higgins who is indifferent to her.

But presently, and here is the second moral, she sees quite clearly that Higgins won't do, that he never, in fact, would have done, and appropriates the good-natured but commonplace Freddy. In so doing, she exhibits herself as a consistent exponent of Shaw's philosophy.

A woman thinks of a man in whom she is interested—the phrase is, I think, Chesterton's—both as a warrior who must make his way and as a child who has lost his way. In his first capacity, her instinct is to strengthen and encourage him that he may go out into the world, make his way and earn bread for her and her children; in his second, she feels impelled to comfort and reassure him, soothing his bruised spirit and salving the hurts that the world has given him. And she feels and acts in this way because of the impulsion of the Life Force which expresses itself in her as a persistent drive to maintain and conserve life at the level which it has already reached and to keep it smoothly functioning at that level.

Now, men like Higgins don't want mothering and reassuring, except in unrepresentative moments. In their

normal moments they are too full of themselves and too full of confidence in themselves. Moreover, since they are originators and innovators through whom life seeks to raise itself to higher levels, they are, as we have seen, unlikely to prove reliable breadwinners. Hence, the woman's instinct is to fight shy of them in the *rôle* of permanent mates and fathers for their children. It is for the same reason that Candida cleaves to the apparently strong, though fundamentally weak Morell and rejects the apparently weak, though really strong Marchbanks who, she knows, can stand on his own feet without her. Wherever there is a serious treatment of love in Shaw's plays, it follows these lines. I have always believed them to be the right lines.

*Anti-professionalism in Butler and Shaw*

Not only were the plays not about the theme whose pervasiveness in contemporary literature and drama had provoked in me the reaction induced by surfeit; they were about themes which I found profoundly interesting. I will take two examples.

First, the theme of anti-professionalism. Nothing excites Shaw's indignation, nothing more surely provokes his sarcasm than the tendency of all professional organisations to regard the profession, the means, as more important than the end which the means are designed to serve. The doctor who thinks of the disease rather than of the patient, the revivalist preacher who thinks of the technique of soul-saving more than of the souls to be saved, the commander who rates the strategy more highly than the winning of the campaign—all these in their different ways illustrate the tendency to sacrifice the spirit to the letter, the substance to the shadow, the end to the means, the purpose to the instrument. Such is, indeed, the besetting vice of all professional organisations who first devise an elaborate ritual for their profession and then proceed to invest it with an almost mystical significance in order to deter

non-professionals from entering the hallowed portals. "No blacklegging by outsiders," "Amateurs will be prosecuted"—such are the slogans by means of which professional organisations seek to enhance the privileges and incidentally to increase the emoluments of the profession. Shaw inherited his anti-professionalism from Samuel Butler, to whom, in the Preface to *Major Barbara*, he has handsomely acknowledged his indebtedness: "When, some years later," he wrote, "I produce plays in which Butler's extraordinarily fresh, free and future-piercing suggestions have an obvious share, I am met with nothing but vague cacklings about Ibsen and Nietzsche"—though he makes no mention of this particular debt.

Butler's anti-professional spleen was chiefly provoked by men of science. One of the reasons why Butler's criticism of Darwin was not taken seriously by scientists was his studious abstention from the use of technical scientific terms.

Butler deliberately avoided the use of scientific terminology because he represented, or professed to represent, the man in the street. In this *rôle* he made it his business to profess what he, in fact, believed—that there was nothing peculiar or unique about science to justify the conspiracy to make science into a mystery. Science, for Butler, as for Shaw, is just organised common sense, and, as such, should be readily intelligible to any person of common sense who takes the trouble to understand it.

Thus Butler explicitly warns his readers, at the end of *Unconscious Memory*, against being "too much cast down by the bad language with which professional scientists obscure the issue, nor by their seeming to make it their business to fog us under the pretence of removing our difficulties. It is not the rat-catcher's interest to catch all the rats; and, as Handel observed so sensibly, 'every professional gentleman must do his best for to live.' "

The hostility which such an attitude was calculated to arouse among scientists may be imagined. Butler wounded the scientists in two of their most important organs, their economics and their morals. All professional bodies exist by maintaining a close vested interest in their profession. If they are manual workers, they call themselves a trade union and regard any person outside the union who poaches on the union's preserves as a potential blackleg. If they are doctors and lawyers, they have a similar antipathy to outsiders, but abuse them under a different name; they are not blacklegs, but quacks and charlatans. Depending as they do upon their technical knowledge for their livelihood, members of the professions cannot afford to admit successful competition by persons not possessing that knowledge. If persons who do not possess the necessary diplomas and credentials of the profession aspire successfully to do what the professional does, the latter's special knowledge will lose its market value and, as a result, his livelihood will be threatened. Hence the opposition of the medical profession to such a man as Sir Herbert Barker, the bone-setter. It was not that the profession denied the efficacy of his methods or regretted their success, but they did deprecate the performance by an outsider of mysteries to which only the initiated should aspire. When an outsider can do well what the insider does poorly, the result not only reflects badly upon the insider, but diminishes the value and importance of being an insider at all.

Now, the relation of Butler and Shaw to the scientists was very much like Sir Herbert Barker's relation as a successful bone-setter to the medical profession. They pooh-poohed the mysteries of the scientific trade and with no weapons but their reading, the deft pen of the literary expert and a fund of common sense set out to show that science was no more than organised common sense.

The scientists were deeply shocked. There were certain canons of taste, certain accepted decencies and

discretions of language, a certain reticence of expression against which both Butler and Shaw offended. The scientist who takes his science seriously does not like to see others take it lightly; still less does he like others to laugh at him for taking it seriously himself.

Now, both Shaw and Butler consistently made fun of those who found the solemnities of science solemn. Not content with dispensing with technicalities, they are forever twitting the scientists with their portentousness of expression, a portentousness which both writers regard as merely a device for concealing obscurity of thought. T. H. Huxley, for instance, in an article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, had described a creature as an "organism which . . . must be classified among fishes." What, said Butler, does this mean if it does not mean that the creature is a fish? That Huxley should write "organism which . . . must be classified among fishes" when he meant fish was a source of inexhaustible entertainment to Butler, which was not by any means diminished when he came upon another sentence of Huxley's in which that eminent scientist prided himself and his fellow scientists on their having "an ineradicable tendency to making things clear." The organism which was "classified among fishes" and "the ineradicable tendency to making things clear" are constantly cropping up in Butler's works. He could not get over them; there they were ready to his hand, and, whenever he is at a loss for a gibe at the scientists, he uses them accordingly.

The same levity appears in Shaw. There is Dr. Paramore in *The Philanderer*, who, when the existence of his particular disease is disproved, instead of being delighted at the news that mankind is freed from a scourge which might have been responsible for many deaths, is overwhelmed with grief because his life's vested interest has been destroyed. There is Cutler Walpole in *The Doctor's Dilemma*, who has invented the "nuciform sac" for the express purpose of acquiring money and reputation by cutting it out. There is that

mellifluous humbug, Sir Ralph Bloomfield Bonington, stimulator of the phagocytes, who has "actually known a man die of a disease from which he was, scientifically speaking, immune." (The whole of the conversation between the doctors in the first act of the play is an admirable example of the irony with which Shaw habitually treats professionalism.) There is the concourse of dramatic critics in *Fanny's First Play*, so blinded by the conventions of their profession that they are largely incapacitated from judging the play on merits. Mr. Flawner Bannal's epic remark, "If it's by a good author, it's a good play, naturally. That stands to reason. Who is the author? Tell me that; and I'll place the play for you to a hair's breadth," scarcely exaggerates the attitude it is meant to epitomise.

*Contemporary Preoccupation with the Sub-normal*

As a second example, I take Shaw's conception of greatness. The concept of greatness is, for me, a subject of fascinated enquiry. What, I have wanted to know, constitutes a great man? By what marks can he be recognised? In this respect, my interests, I have discovered, run counter to the prevailing fashion of our times which tends to concentrate attention upon those who fall below the average human stature rather than upon those who rise above it. Most serious contemporary plays and novels are studies of sub-normal psychology, in the sense that they tend to select as their main interest the earliest and most primitive, not the highest and most lately evolved human faculties and characteristics, the passions and not the will, the emotions and not the intellect, the unconscious and not the conscious, the warped and distorted, not the plain and straightforward, departures from, not illustrations of the norm. When they concern themselves with the will, the intellect, the moral sense and other ostensibly free elements of human consciousness, they represent them as by-products of the functioning of man's passional and emotional

machinery, which throws them up into consciousness as by-products of its own working and which, therefore, naturally determines their deliverances. As a consequence, contemporary literature and art tend to select and concentrate upon personages in whom the primitive elements of human nature are for whatever reason unduly prominent, the child, the drunkard, the half-wit, the sadist, the psychologically abnormal or the sexually perverted.

My objection to this kind of literature and to the interest that inspires it is on the score of dullness. It seems to me that those elements in our make-up which are primitive, passional and childish, are the elements in respect of which we are very largely alike. Lusting after a pretty girl, trembling before a torturer, snatching at a glass of water when tormented by thirst in the desert or, quite simply, getting "tight," my experiences are, I imagine, not very different from those of an Australian aborigine, a Chicago gangster or a Nazi storm-trooper. Listening to a Mozart quartet, speculating on metaphysics, savouring a Château Yqem, listening to an abstruse argument, or appreciating the curve of the line of a down seen against a darkling sky, they are different and, I hope, richer. It seems to me that the more men develop or, more precisely, the more they live according to their most lately evolved and most recently developed faculties, the more they diverge, and that there is, therefore, a much greater range of diversity between highly civilised men living in easy social circumstances with the leisure to develop their faculties and the education to enable them to select those lines of development which are intrinsically worth while, than in savages living a primitive herd-like life in which the reactions of the individual are largely determined by those of his fellows. Now, it is in those respects in which men differ, rather than in those in which they are alike that I find interest. I am interested in their intellects, their wills and their spiritual

idiosyncrasies; in philosophers and artists, therefore, in mystics and saints, in conquerors and prime ministers, above all, in great men.

*The Concept of Greatness*

This confession brings me back to the question, what are the elements in which greatness consists? Is there a differentiating mark by which all great men are distinguished? What would a man be like who had developed as much beyond the point which I have reached, as I have developed beyond the savage and the gangster—or one who had developed only a little beyond myself? It is, for me, a matter of surprise that so little attention should have been given to this question. When great men are mentioned, we think vaguely of Alexander and Cæsar and Napoleon, of Plato and Socrates and Goethe, of Newton and Einstein and Faraday, of Asoka and Peter the Great, of Gustavus Adolphus and of William of Orange, of Bach and Beethoven, of Shakespeare, of Milton, of Michelangelo, of Giotto and Cézanne, precisely because nobody has taught us any better. Now if there is nothing in common between all these men then the word "great" must have a different connotation in some at least of its different applications. If there *is* something in common, then it must be admitted that it is very far from appearing upon the surface.

What candidates for the *rôle* of great men are commonly proffered for our inspection and acceptance? First and foremost, the great destroyers. *Their* statues surmount the highest pedestals in the world's great cities; *their* figures loom largest in the history books. Yet I find it difficult to accept the ability to organise mass slaughter on a large scale as constituting a relevant qualification for greatness; still less can I equate it with the concept. Secondly, there are the administrators and rulers of great empires. But the acquisition of empire almost always entails mass slaughter, while the successful administration of an empire once acquired usually

involves the domination of subject peoples against their wills. Acquisition and administration, though difficult, do not seem to me to be ethically admirable and I cannot rid myself of the notion that greatness should include some morally desirable quality. Of course, there have been great rulers who were also good men—Asoka, for example, and, perhaps, Hadrian, but their exploits are apt to be shadowy and their figures lack definition. Moreover, the conviction—call it a prejudice, if you will—had been bred in me that it was difficult, perhaps impossible, to exercise great power without exhibiting a more than average degree of human sinfulness. Once these rather crude conceptions of greatness had been left behind, the candidates who were put forward were, I thought, open to criticism on the score of specialisation or narrowness. They were either artists like Leonardo or Bach, in whom the human spirit had achieved outstanding development in certain strictly limited directions, or thinkers like Newton and Kant, in whom the intellect alone was remarkable, or saints and mystics, like St. Francis or Father Damien or Catherine of Siena, whose greatness consisted less in their ability to function with distinction in this world than in their eligibility for the next.

The more I reflected on the subject, the more lacking both in definiteness and in content the accepted concepts of greatness came to appear. Why, I wanted to know, did not somebody examine the notion of greatness and tell us in what it consisted.

*Shaw on Greatness*

It was, I thought, to Shaw's credit that he had at least made the attempt. Indeed, it was to him that I owed my first plausible conception of what it meant to be "a great man." The first intimation of the Shavian conception of greatness is conveyed in the sketch of Napoleon in *The Man of Destiny*. This is followed by the full-length portrait of Julius Cæsar which prepares the

way for the concept of the "long-livers" in the third and fourth plays of *Back to Methuselah*. What, then, are the characteristics of the Shavian "great man"?

First, realism; he sees things as they are. Napoleon has "a clear realistic knowledge of human nature in public affairs, having seen it exhaustively tested in that department during the French Revolution." He is "imaginative without illusions, and creative without religion, loyalty, patriotism or any of the common ideals." He is not optimistic and casual as most of us are in regard to matters of time and space, but knows exactly how long things are likely to take and exactly how far they are away, having "a highly evolved faculty for physical geography and for the calculation of times and distances."

Secondly, certainty of aim and fixity of purpose. Cæsar knows exactly what he wants and is not to be turned from his purpose by mishaps such as the affair at the Pharos or seduced from it by the fascinations of Cleopatra.

Thirdly, sustained power of work. Of Napoleon we are told that this was "prodigious" until "it wore him out." Shaw considers whether power of work constitutes the essential element in Cæsar's greatness and rejects the view, though he notes it as a factor capable of producing the illusion of greatness—"it is certainly true," he asserts, "that in civil life mere capacity for work—the power of killing a dozen secretaries under you, so to speak, as a life or death courier kills horses—enables men with common ideas and superstitions to distance all competitors in the strife of political ambition." Shaw is not particularly impressed by Cæsar's military performance, noting that Cæsar is distinguished from most conquerors in being "greater off the battlefield than on it" and hints that his so-called military genius was only a particular example of a more general capacity. Military genius, he suggests, like the capacity for work, is an expression of a more than average vitality, but vitality, as he is careful to point out,

is in itself neither a good thing nor a bad; it has significance only when it is accompanied by "some special quality of mind."

In what does this "special quality of mind" consist? Shaw's answer is in originality. It is originality which "gives a man an air of frankness, generosity and magnanimity, by enabling him to estimate the value of truth, money or success in any particular instance quite independently of convention and moral generalisation." In other words, the originality of the great man consists in his possession of a personal as opposed to a conventional scale of values. His personal scale of values enables him to rise superior to the common weaknesses and emotions of mankind, simply because he has no temptation to yield to common weaknesses and does not feel common emotions. Hence, he appears forgiving, magnanimous, frank and generous because "a man who is too great to resent has nothing to forgive; a man who says things that other people are afraid to say need be no more frank than Bismarck was; and there is no generosity in giving things you do not want to people of whom you intend to make use."

All these characteristics are brought out in the portrayal of Cæsar. He is represented as rising as high above the average of human weaknesses and frailties as the savage or the child falls below it; he is, in fact, at the furthest remove from the primitive and the childish.

*Characteristics of Savages and Children*

What are the distinguishing characteristics of savages and children? They resent injuries and seek to requite them by inflicting immediate suffering on those who make them suffer; they are, therefore, revengeful. They are sensitive and readily take offence; having taken it, they sulk until they are appeased by gifts or apologies. If there is no appeasement, they bear malice and harbour enmity against the real or imaginary perpetrator of their wrongs. They will do him an injury

if they can and, when they get the chance, will pay off old scores with horrible cruelty. In a word, children and savages are noticeably *not* magnanimous, *not* forgiving, *not* merciful. They are, further, particularists in the sense that the particular persons by whom they are immediately surrounded, the particular situations in which they happen immediately to find themselves, the particular moment in which they happen to be living possess for them an overwhelming importance. Hence, they lack both impartiality and rationality, since impartiality may in this connection be defined as an attitude of benevolence to all human beings without distinction of person, simply because they are human, and rationality, as the habit of taking into account considerations which are not *immediately* relevant. The man who is magnanimous, impartial and rational will not have favourites and he will not allow the considerations which press upon him at the moment to obscure his view of other and more important considerations which may not be immediately relevant.

The preoccupation of the savage and the child with the immediate and the particular extends to his amusements which largely depend on the satisfaction of his appetites and the ventilation of his emotions, even when their indulgence involves and is known to involve deprivation and dissatisfaction in the future. Both savages and children spend much time and devote much attention to altering the position of pieces of matter in space. Shaw never tires of depicting these preoccupations with biting humour. Here is one such description taken from the preface to his last volume of plays containing *Geneva*, *Cymbeline Refinished* and *In Good King Charles's Golden Days*:

> Our ablest rulers, he says, "die in their childhood as far as statesmanship is concerned, playing golf and tennis and bridge, smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol as part of their daily diet, hunting, shooting, coursing, reading tales of murder and adultery and

police news, wearing fantastic collars and cuffs, with the women on high heels staining their nails, daubing their lips, painting their faces: in short, doing all sorts of things that are child's play and not the exercises or recreations of statesmen and senators. Even when they have read Plato, the Gospels and Karl Marx, and to that extent know what they have to do, they do not know how to do it, and stick in the old grooves for want of the new political technique which is evolving under pressure of circumstances in Russia. Their attempts at education and schooling end generally in boy farms and concentration camps with flogging blocks, from which the prisoners when they adolesce emerge as trained and prejudiced barbarians with a hatred of learning and discipline, and a dense ignorance of what life is to nine-tenths of their compatriots."

*Sketch of Julius Cæsar*

Magnanimity, impartial benevolence, rationality and a capacity for adult occupations are precisely the qualities which are thrown into high relief in the sketch of Julius Cæsar. He is represented as hating cruelty and slaughter and as being realist enough to see through the pretences by which necessities of government are commonly urged as an excuse for severity. He himself in the past has made use of precisely such pretences and refers with horror to the acts of repressive severity which they were invoked to countenance: "those severed right hands, and the brave Vercingetorix basely strangled in a vault beneath the Capitol were" (*with shuddering satire*) "a wise severity, a necessary protection of the commonwealth, a duty of statesmanship—follies and fictions ten times bloodier than honest vengeance."

Even "honest vengeance" is reprobated. "Vengeance! Vengeance!!" he cries to Lucius Septimus, the slayer of Pompey. "Oh, if I could stoop to vengeance, what would I not exact from you as the price of this murdered

man's blood?" Cleopatra, at the end of the play, describes Cæsar's way of ruling as "without punishment. Without revenge. Without judgment."

Cæsar himself ascribes the exercise of his distinguishing qualities of mercy and impersonal benevolence to his realism. It is because he sees further than other men and sees things as they are that he realises that action inspired by the contrary qualities of malevolence and vengefulness is bad policy, precisely because it arouses the desire for retaliation in its victims. Hence, he represents what are commonly regarded as moral qualities as no more than the calculations of a long-sighted expediency. "These knockers at your gate," he says to Cleopatra, who has tried to defend herself for the murder of Pothinus, "are also believers in vengeance and in stabbing. You have slain their leader; it is right that they shall slay you. If you doubt it, ask your four counsellors here. And then in the name of that right" (*he emphasises the word with great scorn*) "shall I not slay them for murdering their Queen, and be slain in my turn by their countrymen as the invader of their father-land? Can Rome do less than slay these slayers, too, to show the world how Rome avenges her sons and her honour. And so, to the end of history, murder shall breed murder, always in the name of right and honour and peace, until the gods are tired of blood and create a race that can understand."

But the questions may be asked: Is it true that Cæsar's magnanimity is no more than a realist's view of what is expedient? Cæsar is represented as a man free from malice, who is either devoid of or in complete control of common passions. It is the common passions, more particularly the passions of hatred and revenge which throughout human history have found vent in slaughter, punishment and destruction. They make men cruel and blind them to the truth that magnanimity is almost always expedient, being, to use Bishop Butler's phrase, merely the dictate of cool self-love. Now, is it,

I have asked myself, fair to regard Cæsar's comparative immunity from these human weaknesses and frailties as non-moral? Should it not rather be credited to him as a virtue? To put the point in other words, are Cæsar's mercy and magnanimity no more than a clear-slighted recognition of expediency or are they expressions of what most men would call goodness?

Shaw's answer to this question is characteristic and important. Cæsar's qualities he says, in effect, are not moral qualities precisely because Cæsar is not tempted, as other men are tempted, to cruelty and revenge; consequently, he has no need of self-control, precisely because he has no passions to control. Hence, he provides the appearance of virtue by simply and selfishly following the dictates of his nature. "In order to produce an impression of complete disinterestedness and magnanimity he has only to act with entire selfishness." "This," Shaw comments, "is perhaps the only sense in which a man can be said to be *naturally* great." This brings us to Shaw's concept of "natural virtue."

*Puritan Doctrine of Moral Virtue*

The normal view of virtue in Protestant and, more particularly, in Anglo-Saxon countries represents it as a condition or character that can be achieved only through struggle. We are not naturally virtuous; on the contrary, we are born in sin. Hence, whatever degree of virtue we can contrive to acquire is acquired in the teeth of our natural propensity to be morally indifferent or even morally vicious. It is, of course, true that some men are born lucky in the sense that they do not want to do wrong, or don't want to very often. Their's is a smaller dose of natural sin than that of average men. But their merit, such as it is, is not ethical; their abstention from vice, not morally virtuous. They are, according to the common view, the lucky possessors of a quality analogous to the endowment of a good eye at games. Now, nobody supposes that the circumstances of

possessing a good eye at games is morally creditable. The graceful strokes, the suave and flowing style of the naturally gifted tennis player may evoke our æsthetic appreciation, but our moral admiration is reserved for the man who, possessing no natural advantages, succeeds by the strength of his determination and his capacity to endure in winning the fifth and final set against his naturally more gifted opponent whom he has succeeded in wearing down. Similarly, there is no bravery in "going over the top" when you have been made too drunk to feel fear. The brave man is he who feels fear and overcomes it—that is to say, acts as if he did not feel it—a distinction which we recognise by stigmatising the "courage" of the man who has drunk himself stupid with rum as "Dutch."

The bearing of these examples is plain. There is, we feel, no moral credit in doing what we can do easily and agreeably; moral credit only comes into the picture where there is conflict and struggle. Thus, it is not morally creditable in me that I refrain from sadistic sexual practices and gross drunkenness; I have no temptation to either. I begin to be virtuous only when I succeed, however intermittently, in controlling a naturally irritable temper. The philosopher, Kant, carried this doctrine to the point of suggesting that no course of conduct can ever be our duty, unless it is disagreeable. The conclusion is that we can only achieve moral virtue in so far as our *natural* disposition is vicious. Such, at least, seem to be the implications of most ethical writing in Protestant countries on this topic. Most, but not all, for there is another side to the matter.

*Shaw's Doctrine of Natural Virtue*

For we can also plausibly maintain that the man who feels no temptation to do wrong is morally better than the man who is easily and often tempted and does, in fact, often yield to his temptation.

A good man, we may plausibly affirm, is one who acts as he ought to do; who, in fact, does his duty.

Must he, one wonders, always dislike it? And if he *does* always dislike it, can he be really good? Hence in opposition to the doctrine that moral virtue is something which is achieved in the teeth of a temptation to be vicious, we may urge the contrary view that virtue is natural.

According to this doctrine we might define the perfectly good man as one who habitually and unhesitatingly does what is right. For the perfectly good man is not, one would have said, a man who, by taking continual thought for his virtue, by being constantly on his guard against temptation, avoids doing wrong; he is rather one who, because of the inherent goodness of his nature, experiences no temptation to act otherwise than as the dictates of morality demand. So habitual, so almost instinctive would be the right conduct of such a man that he might almost be described as being unconscious of it.

Now this is the doctrine that Shaw invokes to explain the magnanimity of Cæsar. Cæsar is a great man in "perhaps the only sense in which a man can be said to be *naturally* great," that is to say, in the sense in which to be great is to be immune from most of the desires that natural flesh is heir to. Hence the observations that I have already quoted to the effect that "a man who is too great to resent has nothing to forgive; a man who says things that other people are afraid to say need be no more frank than Bismarck was; and there is no generosity in giving things you do not want to people of whom you intend to make use."

Shaw gives the name "natural virtue" to this comparative immunity from temptation and distinguishes it from what he calls "goodness" which "in its popular British sense of self-denial, implies that man is vicious by nature, and that supreme goodness is supreme martyrdom." He complains that the heroes known to the British stage are good only in this latter sense, are in fact, mere "goody-goodies." At the same time he is not quite sure whether it is correct to identify greatness with "natural virtue" as exhibited in an immunity

from common weaknesses springing from an indifference to common objects of desire. For he is clear-sighted enough to see that to exhibit a great man as "simply doing what he naturally wants to do . . . raises the question whether our world has not been wrong in its moral theory for the last 2,500 years or so." It does indeed.

*Transition to Shavian Philosophy*

I have dwelt on this conception not only because of its intrinsic interest and because it affords a striking illustration of my contention that Shaw's plays are "about something," but also because it leads very naturally to a consideration of Shaw's general philosophy. For it presently appears that Cæsar is not merely a man of "original mind," enabled by virtue of his originality to set a different value, which is also a lower value, upon the things that men commonly desire, nor even a man of "natural virtue" immune from the passions to which ordinary men are exposed who produces an impression of goodness by merely following the dictates of his nature; he is also a being set apart. He is conscious of this himself. At the beginning of the play he classes himself with the Sphinx on the ground of their common solitariness: "I have found flocks and pastures, men and cities, but no other Cæsar, no air native to me, no man kindred to me, none who can do my day's deed and think my night's thought. . . . Sphinx, you and I, strangers to the rest of men, are no strangers to one another." Cæsar, then, is made of a stuff different from that of his fellows. Why different? Different, perhaps, because more highly developed, or, perhaps, because more recently evolved. For the characteristics which have been enumerated, power of work, realism, impartiality, "natural virtue" expressing itself in a superiority to common weaknesses and passions, the possession of an original which is also a personal scale of values—Cæsar does not, as Plato would put it, like and dislike, revere and despise the things

that "the City" likes and dislikes, reveres and despises—these are precisely the characteristics which distinguish the Shavian supermen, when they presently began to make their appearance in the third play of *Back to Methuselah*. They are also the characteristics which appear in a more fully developed form in the long-livers of the fourth play; they reach their apogee in the Ancients in the fifth. In his sketches of great men, in Cæsar and in a lesser degree in Napoleon, we see the first concrete applications of the tenets of the philosophy of Creative Evolution upon which Shaw's mind had for some time past been unconsciously engaged. And the suggestion which these sketches convey is that the ordinary weaknesses and passions of frail and fallible human beings are legacies from man's past. Hence, we can measure a man's position in the scale of evolutionary development by the degree of his immunity from them. "Great men" are evolutionary "sports" in whom life expresses itself at a higher level than that which the average of humanity exemplifies. As Shaw puts it in one of his latest prefaces great men (and women) "prove that though we in the mass are only child Yahoos it is possible for creatures built exactly like us, bred from our unions and developed from our seeds to reach the heights of these towering heads." To be a great man is, then, to be a harbinger of what our species, if the Life Force continues to develop in and through us, may one day become; and here we find ourselves at the threshold of Shaw's philosophy which will occupy us in the next chapter but one.

## CHAPTER VI

## THE POLITICIAN

BEFORE I COME TO the philosophy which, for me, is the gist of the matter, I must turn aside to write a chapter on Shaw, the politician, or, to give a more

accurate description, the political writer and thinker. It will be, I fear, an unsatisfactory chapter, for it is under this aspect that, I confess, Shaw has appealed to me least. At first, indeed, it was not so. I admired Shaw, the playwright and philosopher, partly because he was also a politician; was, that is to say, somebody who not only advanced theories and propounded reforms but sought to apply the theories and campaigned on behalf of the reforms, making speeches in season and out of season on public platforms, devoting time and energy to the work of local government—he was a St. Pancras vestryman who, Hesketh Pearson tells us, "worked from two to four hours on Committee afternoons for over six years at the Town Hall"—and showing himself a first-rate chairman of Fabian committees.

*Reflections on Specialisation*

This versatility seemed to me to be wholly admirable. I fell early under the influence of Plato and was captivated by the ideal of the philosopher-guardians. It was not so much that I wanted to supersede democracy and breed or train a specially educated caste to run the State, as that I wanted those who were specially trained and educated to put themselves in the forefront of the political battle and so commend themselves to the mass of the people that a sufficient number were induced to vote for them to return them to Parliament. Once in Parliament they would by the display and exercise of their superior talents persuade their fellow members to entrust them with the job of running the community, so that Plato's result would be reached by democratic methods. Plato's famous saying to the effect that philosophers should be kings is continually quoted. What is not so often remarked is the continuation of the celebrated passage. It runs: "Unless the numerous natures who at present pursue either politics or philosophy, the one to the exclusion of the other, be forcibly debarred from this behaviour, there will be no respite

from evil, my dear Glaucon, for cities, nor, I fancy, for humanity," which I interpreted to mean that artists, writers, philosophers, wits, historians, scientists, dons and even poets should enter politics and wield power equally with business men, lawyers, trade union secretaries and ex-manual labourers.

I was never content that the don should be only a don, and the politician merely a politician. I could not see why the learning of the former should be wasted in the lecture-room while the deliberations of the latter should be uninformed by a knowledge of what great men have thought and said memorably about life. I was a critic of specialisation. I had been taught by the Greeks to believe not only that the man who developed every side of his nature was the most complete of individuals and led the happiest of lives, but also that the State which had the sense to entrust such men with the conduct of its affairs was the most civilised and enlightened of States. I used to cite in this connection the city States of ancient Greece and Renaissance Italy.

I still hold this view. Since my youth specialisation has increased, learned men lecture only to undergraduates and write books on esoteric subjects which only learned men read, while politicians start in the workshop and graduate to the House of Commons through the management of trade unions and the conduct of local affairs. Without scholarship or culture, they claim experience of what is vaguely known as "life," by which presumably is meant that during most of their lives they have been poor and that their main concerns have been wives, children, food, warmth and shelter and how to get them, have, in fact, been the concerns of the savage.

The nineteenth century provided a number of educated and able individuals animated by public spirit and frequently supported by an independent income who were anxious to play their part in public affairs. In the twentieth century those who might have

succeeded them are discouraged by the greater scale of politics, the impersonality of the factors that determine events and the ever-increasing difficulty of modifying their course. Moreover, there is a lack of supporting independent incomes. Hence, arises a feeling of personal helplessness as a result of which voluntary societies formed for the popularisation of creeds, the advocacy of causes, or the realisation of reforms are increasingly run by disappointed and frustrated cranks. These, then, are some of the symptoms of specialisation. Its results are seen in the falling off in public spirit and the withdrawal from the service of the community of some of the best minds of the contemporary generation.

*Shaw's Versatility*

Now, I was first attracted by Shaw's political activities because they entailed a repudiation of specialisation. For, with Shaw, politics was only a particular aspect of far-flung public activities, which were themselves only an extension to the public platform and the committee-room of his work in the study and the theatre. Shaw was not just a theorist setting out in his celebrated Fabian essay what was wrong with the economics of landlordism in a capitalist society and how it could be put right; he was constantly trying to put it right. What was more, as the result of his efforts and of the efforts of men like him, it really seemed as if it might be put right, for in that golden age before 1914 nothing was impossible and progress was still a reasonable bet. And the best of it all was, I repeat, that Shaw was not just a politician; he was also and at the same time a playwright and a philosopher, who nevertheless contrived to beat the politicians at their own game. I admired this versatility, just as I admired the man who rowed in his college boat while at the same time contriving to get a First in Greats, or who played Rugger for the 'Varsity while finding time to become President of the Union.

Now I think that Chesterton is undoubtedly right, at any rate in regard to those earlier years, when he says that, for Shaw, politics was the main thing. What Chesterton meant was that Shaw's chief concern was to alter the arrangements of society with a view to making the world a better place and life a better thing for society's citizens. He was, as Chesterton puts it, inspired by "the real and ancient emotion of the *salus populi*." Again, it is hard to doubt that, had Shaw's primary concern *not* been politics, he could have achieved a far quicker and easier fame. If, for example, he had only been willing to turn his hand to writing the plays that the public wanted, what a West End success he could have had! He refused precisely because, as he insists,[1] he was not so much a playwright as a man who was trying to give the world a piece of his mind. This disdain of a cheap popularity, this abandonment of an easy fame, has always seemed to me one of the finest things in Shaw's career. I cannot refrain from quoting Chesterton's verdict, written in 1914, in my support:

> "Here was a man who could have enjoyed art among the artists, who could have been the wittiest of all the *flaneurs*; who could have made epigrams like diamonds and drunk music like wine. He has instead laboured in a mill of statistics and crammed his mind with all the most dreary and the most filthy details, so that he can argue on the spur of the moment about sewing-machines or sewage, about typhus fever or twopenny Tubes."

*The Difficulties Created by Many-sidedness*

It is not easy for a man to make a name for himself in more than one sphere. The difficulty is occasioned less by the rareness of outstanding excellence which is also many-sided than by the reluctance of the world to acclaim it. For the world disparages, in proportion as it

[1] See Chapter V, pp. 93, 94.

envies versatility. It is only grudgingly that the public can be brought to admit that a man may perform creditably in more than one *rôle*; but that he should achieve greatness in a number of *rôles*—to concede this, most of us find altogether too much. I suppose that, labouring as we do under a consciousness of ineluctable mediocrity, we may, nevertheless, find ourselves compelled by unmistakable evidence to admit that a man may be a first-rater where we are only second-raters. But that he should be a first-rater in a number of different spheres is altogether too much for our self-esteem.

Be that as it may, one of the greatest difficulties Shaw had to overcome was the public's determination to confine the outpourings of his many-sided genius along a single channel. Politicians and philosophers defended themselves for their refusal to take him seriously on the ground that he was only a playwright; critics refused to take the plays seriously because they were only conversations or political tracts, as if the fact that a play concerned itself with some problem of current public interest was an offence against the canons of dramatic art, while the public generally refused to take him seriously because he would insist on entertaining it. Shaw was continuously witty; therefore, he could not be sincere. He was enormously amusing; therefore, he could not be serious. He was a great showman; therefore, he must be a mountebank. He continued to enunciate obvious truths; therefore, as in Max's famous cartoon, he must be a man standing on his head. He persistently called the public fools; therefore he must be playing the fool.

And, here, I suggest, we encounter one of the fundamental idiosyncrasies of the Anglo-Saxon race. For it is only among us that it is taken for granted that if a man is in earnest he must be dull, and that if his works make for righteousness they must be unreadable. Yet a moment's reflection should surely convince us that whether a man expresses himself amusingly or boringly depends not upon the nature of the subject matter

which he has to express, nor upon his own attitude to that subject matter, as, for example, whether he seriously means what he says, or is only putting it forward as an intellectual exercise, or adopting it for the sake of sustaining a pose, but simply and solely upon whether he is an amusing or a boring person.

It was Shaw's incorrigible refusal to confine his activities to playwrighting or pamphleteering, his determination to appear before the public *both* as political thinker and as playwright, which, coupled with the Anglo-Saxon idiosyncrasy to which I have alluded, was responsible for the slowness with which his reputation was established. In the long run, I think his versatility assisted his reputation and in the end promoted the growth of the Shavian legend. For if a man is great enough to break through the barriers of public indifference or hostility on all fronts, then his eminence in one sphere, so far from diminishing, only contributes to his eminence in the others. In the long run, his stature is not lessened but enlarged by reason of the fact that it overtops that of his competitors not merely in one, but in a number of different *rôles*, and he establishes himself not simply as a great playwright or a great political thinker, or a great pamphleteer, or a great wit, or a great orator, or a great philosopher, but simply as a great man. This is what has happened to Shaw, as it happened to Dr. Johnson and to Voltaire. But it is only to first-raters that it does happen; smaller men are prejudiced by their versatility.

*Politics as Shaw's Primary Concern*

Eminent in so many spheres and resolutely refusing to accept an easy reputation in any at the expense of the rest, it is, nevertheless, as a political and sociological thinker that Shaw first claimed the public's attention. Chesterton is surely right in saying that Shaw was primarily a teacher whose concern was to make men better or, at least, to make their societies more tolerable.

The primary objective was, as I have said, to give the public a piece of his mind in the hope that a piece of his mind might knock some sense into its head. That is why he wrote prefaces which were political tracts and plays which, as we have seen, were little more than dramatic illustrations of the doctrines of his prefaces. It is, indeed, as a political and social writer that Shaw himself wished primarily to be judged. His doctrines seemed at times so outrageous that people insisted that he must be making fools of them, whereas he was, in fact, quite simply calling them fools: fools because they insisted on tolerating such a manifestly inequitable society, fools because they paid the business man ten times as much as the miner, on the assumption apparently that the business man needed ten times as much housing and warming and clothing and re-fuelling in the matter of food and drink, fools because they entrusted the conduct of the affairs of State to ignorant amateurs.

Again, there is not the slightest doubt that Shaw did originally believe that men could by sheer power of argument and demonstration be made to see where justice and reason lay and so to alter the arrangements of the communities in which they lived that they might be brought nearer to the requirement of justice and the dictates of reason. How otherwise explain the early work for the Fabian Society, the hours of committee attendance, the constant platform appearances, the deliberate cultivation of the arts of the propagandist orator? Shaw's original *rôle* was, in fact, as I pointed out in Chapter IV,[1] that of a rationalist. He believed, at any rate he behaved as if he believed, that truth could be imparted by demonstration and conviction engendered by argument. From the first, however, my interest was engaged less by Shaw's political than by his other writings. It seemed to me even in those early days something of a waste that a man who could write

[1] See pp. 60, 61.

so understandingly about the universe and so entertainingly about men and women should devote his talents to disquisitions on rent and profit and spend so much of his time upon committees. Any hard-working Fabian could do as much, even if he could not do it so well. Shaw did it very well indeed. Even so, his political writing was less enthralling than, for example, his writings on philosophy, art, science, the family, or the relations between the sexes. On local government, Shaw could even contrive to be boring, and I had better here make a clean breast of the fact that I could never persist to the end of the *Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism*.

*Influence without Power*

Moreover, I could never wholly rid myself of the view that the purpose of politics was to obtain power—power to put your ideas into practice. Now, the source of power was the House of Commons. Yet Shaw never showed signs of being willing to enter the House of Commons; on the contrary, he refused constituency after constituency. Thus, the effect of a lifetime of propaganda has been to bring Shaw influence without power, with the result that in spite of his undoubted paper and platform successes, most of the causes and creeds in which he believed have lost rather than gained influence since he began to advocate them, while the world as a whole has gone consistently from bad to worse since he first addressed it.

I ventured to say as much in July, 1943, in the middle of the last war, in an article in the *New Statesman*. I include the article, which was written in the form of an imaginary dialogue, here because it drew forth an interesting reply from Shaw which is also included.

*An Imaginary Dialogue*

C.E.M.J.: "You know, G.B.S., I am and have always been one of your most enthusiastic disciples. I grew up in a world, the world of 1910-1914, in which all advanced

young men who knew what politically was what acknowledged you as their natural leader. Socialism seemed just round the corner, a corner which, marching gaily under the Shavian banner, we were about to turn. For me, then, and for many like me, you were never just a playwright who succeeded in producing plays which were more or less entertaining; you were a philosopher and a prophet who preached the gospel of a new world. While doing so, you have incidentally shown yourself to be the best critic, the best prose writer, the best pamphleteer, the best platform speaker, and the most continuously amusing wit of the age. Nor have the thirty years that have since elapsed shown us your equal in any one of these departments. This verdict is amply borne out by Hesketh Pearson's book, from the pages of which you emerge as large as life and, if possible, twice as natural."

G.B.S.: "Yes, it is a good biography. I wrote most of it myself."

C.E.M.J. (*lyrically*): "What a stream of ideas, what a flow of wit, what speeches, what letters, what gorgeous conversations and, as a consequence, what exhilaration in the reader who gets a glimpse of life lived at a higher potential than he has known in himself or his fellows. This, he feels regretfully, is how my life too might have been. You see, G.B.S., any incident that happens to you, any anecdote of which you are the subject is ten times gayer and more amusing than any incident in or anecdote about the life of anybody else. A great wind of the spirit blows through the book, and by the time he has got to the end of it he must be a very dull dog of a reader, if a breath or two has not found its way into him. . . . And yet, and yet, when I put it down I was sensible of a feeling of depression."

G.B.S.: "A dull dog, eh?"

C.E.M.J.: "Not at all. My depression was rooted not in me, but in the times. It was the contrast between the effort and its result that depressed me. Such an

appearance of achievement, so vast a listening public, so apparently respectful a world—and then look at the world! In spite of its attention, in spite of its apparent respect, it is so far from giving heed to what you told it that it has gone consistently from bad to worse ever since you began to address it. Now, taught by you, I have always believed in the power of ideas—that 'what a man thinks determines what he does,' and so on. Yet, here are ideas, the ideas of the Shavian philosophy, put over with all the force and vivacity of a genius for publicity, winning sweeping victories in the intellectual field, yet producing apparently absolutely no effect anywhere else."

G.B.S.: "I deluged the public with novelties. You cannot expect my gospel to be assimilated in a mere sixty years or so by a race as incorrigibly thick-headed as the English."

C.E.M.J.: "But they *have* assimilated it, or so they believe. The young maintain that they know all your ideas inside out, and regard you as an entertaining old buffer announcing period-piece platitudes and striking period-piece attitudes."

G.B.S. (*chuckling*): "That is because they owe whatever they have got in the way of minds to me. I have tinted the intellectual spectacles of this generation, so, naturally enough, when they look out on the world they see everything in my colours. It is the Nemesis that waits upon the man who tells the truth for the first time that after a time people think they have always known what he told them."

C.E.M.J.: "Perhaps. But you are evading the main point which is the spectacle presented by the contemporary world. How much of your teaching do you suppose has been learnt by the world to-day? And by 'learnt' I don't only mean accepted in theory, but acted on in practice."

G.B.S.: "Far more than you seem to think. I taught that poverty is the greatest evil—an evil that no State

should permit in its citizens. I added that every citizen should insist upon having money, even if he had to beg, borrow, steal, and generally make himself a social nuisance until he got it. Well, the Beveridge Report concedes the point. It also concedes a second—that in a modern community we are all members of one another in so intimate a sense that the misery and degradation of one are the misery and degradation of all. We have, all of us, as citizens, a collective responsibility for each of us, a fact which Social Insurance, on the latest Beveridge model, very properly recognises. And that is not the end of it. Do you remember the fuss I made about equality of income, the only kind of equality, I argued in the *Intelligent Woman's Guide*, that really mattered? Well, what about Beveridge's proposal to pay all benefits (except for Workmen's Compensation) at the same rate, irrespective of the amount of a man's earnings? Whose teaching inspired that proposal, I should like to know, if it was not mine? Have you read the Labour Party's pamphlet on the *Old World and the New Society*?"

C.E.M.J.: "I have glanced at it."

G.B.S.: "Have you indeed! Very good of you, I'm sure. If you were to take the trouble to read it properly, instead of merely glancing at it, you would find it full of Shavings. Take this one, for example, on education. 'We have to provide educational opportunities for all which ensure that our cultural heritage is denied to none.' Equality again, you see!"

C.E.M.J.: "But what sort of education are we—'we' being, I suppose, the State—to provide?"

G.B.S.: "Look up my preface to *Misalliance* and you will see. Haven't I been careful to point out that 'civic education does not mean education in blind obedience to authority, but education in controversy and liberty'?"

C.E.M.J.: "I dare say. But do the civic authorities agree? They don't in Germany."

G.B.S.: "You mustn't expect too much at once; I

have always insisted that the pioneers must lead the way. Do you mean to tell me that when I set all the educational world by the ears with 'the vilest abortionist is he who attempts to mould a child's character' the pioneers did not start pricking up their ears? Go to Dartington and see the admirable expression that they are there giving to the truth which I had, as usual, to over-state in order to startle the British public into paying attention. Dartington is setting a new standard in education which anybody who knows what's what will presently be only too eager to follow. What about Prison Reform? We no longer condemn men to lengthy periods of solitary confinement, or put them in chains for unsuccessful attempts to escape. Modesty forbids me to draw attention to the repeated hammering away at both points that I've kept up all through my career."

C.E.M.J.: "Yes, of course I agree that in a lot of small, incidental ways the world to-day is saner, more humane, and less prejudiced than when you began to preach to it, and I should be the last to belittle the share which your teaching has had in producing enlightenment.

"But it is at the overall picture that I would have you look. Who said, for example, 'a civilisation cannot progress without criticism, and must, therefore, to save itself from stagnation and putrefaction, declare impunity for criticism'? Do you find that *that* condition of civilisation is satisfied in the contemporary world? Or, again, 'progress depends on our refusal to use brutal means even if they are efficacious.' How much progress do you discern within the terms of your own definition? And what of your religion? You postulated no original creative God, and did not, therefore, have the problem of evil on your hands; your universe created itself as it went along, and the creative energy that drove it might one day, you conceived, produce a God. Meanwhile the farthest that you could see in that direction was the Ancients. Does anybody, I ask you, show the slightest signs of accepting that religion? The scientists

repudiate it, denying the inheritance of acquired characteristics which it entails and the primacy of mind which it pre-supposes. The young will have none of it; they are still living in the waste lands strewn with the *débris* of the idols you cast down, but they show no tendency whatever to set up the gospel of the Life Force in their place. It is part of my job to hear them talk of these things, and I can assure you that this is so. Nor does the Life Force itself make a sign; the folly and cruelty of man never provoked it with a greater challenge to supersede him, but it gives no indication of doing so. It is too much, I dare say, to expect an Ancient, but the Life Force has not even screwed itself up to the point of producing a Long Liver."

G.B.S.: "The Life Force, you will remember, proceeds by trial and error. Trial and error take time. And as to the Long Livers, remember that I am eighty-seven and still going strong."

C.E.M.J.: "I am delighted to hear it. But suppose you were to begin all over again? Do you think that you would have an easier job in trying to knock some sense into the heads of the British public and to create an appetite for the drama of ideas than you had fifty years ago?"

G.B.S.: "My plays which fifty or sixty years ago no manager would look at are now box-office gilt-edged securities. They have even invaded the cinema. Haven't you heard of the *Doctor's Dilemma* and *Pygmalion*?"

C.E.M.J.: "That's because you are accepted as a classic. I am asking you to envisage the coming of a new Shaw, whose ideas seem as outrageous to the world of to-day as yours were in the 'nineties. Would he have any better reception?"

G.B.S.: "You forget there is a war on, and wars always run dramatically to legs and teeth."

C.E.M.J.: "But it was in the 'twenties that you yourself were apologising to posterity 'for living in a country where the capacity and tastes of schoolboys

and sporting costermongers are the measure of Metropolitan culture.' "

G.B.S.: "That was twenty years ago."

C.E.M.J.: "Are we grown better since? Let me put the point in another way. Hesketh Pearson's book contains an account of the funeral of Thomas Hardy in 1928 when you and Kipling and Gosse and Galsworthy and Barrie and A. E. Housman acted as pall-bearers. A very intriguing account it is too. Now let us suppose that you are dead, and that, by some caprice of official taste, *your* remains are impounded to follow those of Hardy into Westminster Abbey. Who would there be to act as pall-bearers for *you*?"

G.B.S.: "What about yourself?"

C.E.M.J.: "Please be serious. I am suggesting that concurrently with, and in spite of the popularity of your ideas which, as you say, tinted the whole intellectual outlook of a generation, a process of de-civilisation has been at work in the world. In witness, I cite the decline in the general level of literary and dramatic taste, and the continuous erosion of the environment in which alone original thought and work in literature and art can be recognised and encouraged. You counter by telling me that the great man must make his own way and create his own public, as you had to do. Very possibly, but where are the great men to do it? Where are the equivalent six pall-bearers in 1943? There's E. M. Forster, I suppose; Priestley, admitted rather grudgingly; T. S. Eliot possibly, and Wells, if he is still alive and kicking and the Abbey will have him. Oh, and of course there is Somerset Maugham, though I expect both Wells and Maugham would sooner see themselves dead than set foot in the Abbey."

G.B.S.: "That's precisely what they will have to do."

C.E.M.J.: "I beg you to be serious. My point is that whatever you may think of my five, they are none of them chickens. Where are the new men?"

G.B.S.: "You want too much for your money.

Remember this is only the fag-end of a dialogue by you, in which, incidentally, I notice you have given yourself all the best things to say. What you want is an article by me."

C.E.M.J.: "By all means. Let us have it."

Shaw's reply, printed in the same issue, was as follows:

*Mr. Shaw Responds*

"Joad's lyrical opening naturally pleases me. Being a born playwright I am also a born actor; and when Joad arrived, a born philosopher, in the glory of his adolescence, I was playing my part well enough to engage the hero-worship of youth, and impose myself on the susceptible as all that Joad says I was. I cannot impose on myself to the same pitch; but every actor likes to have his histrionic skill flattered, though he knows that the effect it has made is mostly illusory. I purr when I am kindly stroked, like any other lion.

"Now let us get down to tin-tacks. I am not at all dashed by the fact that my preachings and prophetisings, like those of the many sages who have said the same things before me, seem to have produced no political change—that, as Joad says, the world has been going from bad to worse since I gave tongue and pen. Now it is true that the England of Pecksniffs and Podsnaps has not become an England of Ruskins and Bernard Shaws. It is equally true, and far more deplorable, that government by adult suffrage has made democracy impossible. Now that the political ignorance of Everywoman has been enfranchised and added to the political ignorance and folly of Everyman, and government is by Anybody chosen by Everybody, both Joad and I may be thankful that we are at the mercy of Mr. Winston Churchill rather than of Titus Oates or Horatio Bottomley, to say nothing of living scarecrows. But the world does not consist wholly of Tewlers and Begonia Browns as depicted in fiction by H. G. Wells and myself. Whilst their world has been going from bad to worse the circulation of my books and the vogue of my plays has

been increasing. Joad, who began as my disciple, throwing Darwin and Herbert Spencer, the leaders of 'advanced' thought in the nineteenth century, into the dustbin, and banking on Butler and Bergson as the genuine evolutionists, has played me off the stage as a popular philosopher, and is actually a parliamentary candidate. This is not going from bad to worse but from bad to better, though I am deeply grieved to see my quondam disciple suicidally wasting his invaluable time trying to get into an institution in which he will be extinguished by the property system and its Party machine impregnably fortified by the votes of Tewler and Begonia. His proper political business is to unmask such mock-democratic shams, and make Parliament a simple Duma to ventilate the grievances of Tewler and Begonia, leaving qualified people to find the remedies. Our rulers must be chosen from the best panels of qualified people we can devise, and not picked up in the street like coroners' juries.

"As to equality, Joad has not gone far enough into its practice. Stalin is as impatient of Equality Merchants, as he calls them, as of Trotskyist World Revolutionists, Currency Cranks, and, in general, Lefts who are never right. All I contributed to the ancient theme was that without sufficient equality of income to make all classes intermarriageable a stable society is impossible, and that the notion that merit can be equated with money by any sort of economic algebra is silly, and can be exploded by asking its dupes to prescribe in figures the ideal incomes for the Archbishop of Canterbury and Mr. Joseph Louis. But to give everybody an equal share of the national income to-day would reduce us all to such overcrowded poverty that science, art, and philosophy would be impossible. Civilisation would perish, and with it most of the people. In Russia they can maintain their Socialism only by paying their directors and experts ten times as much as they can spare for the rank and file of the labourers. It is the business of the

favoured ones to work up production until there is enough to afford the ten-fold figure for everybody. Then, and then only, can intermarriageable equality become possible; and when that is achieved nobody will bother more about mathematical equality of income than they do now in the rich sections where ten thousand a year can intermarry with fifty thousand without friction. Enough is enough: when there is plenty for everybody nobody will listen to the Exact Equality Merchants; and meanwhile they must be shoved out of the way as Stalin has shoved them.

"So buck up, Joad: there is much to be done everywhere except in the House of Commons, from which may you be long preserved. There is only one deadly disease: discouragement. Even if the Soul of Man cannot march as far as your thought and mine can reach, the resources of the Holy Ghost are not yet demonstrably exhausted. If Man fails to do the trick, some more capable species will evolve and succeed.

"When Ibsen was invited to assume a Party label he replied that he had both the Left and the Right in him, and was glad to have his ideas adopted by any Party. I find myself very much in the same position, and am sometimes surprised and amused, as I go father and farther to the Left, to find that the world is round and that the extreme Left is the old Right with its nonsense and corruption cleaned off. What are the New Order, the Atlantic Charter, the International Council, the New Commonwealth, the Co-operative Commonwealth and the rest but the latest calls for a Holy Catholic Church? Stalin's mother was not far wrong when she tried to make him a priest, seeing that he has made himself a Pope more mighty than his Roman rival. I wonder has Joad ever asked himself how much he believes of the Apostles' Creed. In our nonage we should both have said, 'Not a word of it.' But I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, and the Life Everlasting. Does Joad say, Amen?"

In spite of Shaw's repudiation of my impeachment, it is difficult not to feel that as the twentieth century advanced, he was himself sensible of a certain disappointment in regard to the success of his efforts to make people see reason. The sense in which I have defined Rationalism in Chapter IV[1] entails that to be a rationalist is to be an optimist; it entails, that is to say, that you believe that people really are teachable and, if teachable, improvable. It is, indeed, only on this supposition that education is justified as a method of training and democracy defensible as a method of government.

*The Right and Left in Politics Contrasted*

It is upon their respective attitudes to this belief that the fundamental differences between Right and Left in politics ultimately rest. The Left holds that human nature is not something fixed and unalterable but that it evolves and that, given proper training assisted by luck and circumstance, the evolution may become development. Whether it will do so or not depends on two things, improved material conditions and improved education, the term "education" being extended to include psychological treatment in early childhood. Give the growing citizen good conditions, proper housing, adequate space, exercise, light and heat, good food and warmth, remove him, in fact, from poverty and the fear of poverty, so train his mind that he becomes capable of passing judgment upon public issues, apprehending the truth when it is presented to him clearly and forcibly and acting in accordance with the truth he has apprehended, and, the Left believes, society will get better and better. And as society improves so, inevitably, will its members. For there is nothing inherently faulty about human beings; nor, is what seems faulty incorrigible. On the contrary, mankind is by nature good; if not in actuality, then at

[1] See pp. 60, 61.

least potentially and our vices are a demonstrable by-product of bad material and social conditions. Remove the conditions and the vices will disappear. Hence, the object of political action is so to modify the conditions that the impediment which they at present offer to the realisation of the potential faculties and the fulfilment of the potential virtues of human nature no longer exists. In order to effect this modification experiments are allowable and risks may be run; many would go further and maintain that a definite obligation is laid upon government to devise experiments and run risks designed to change and improve the social background of people's lives. It follows that it is the business of Parliament continually to make laws.

The Right, on the other hand, is fundamentally distrustful of human nature and sceptical as to the possibilities of its improvement. Without necessarily embracing the doctrine of original sin as a matter of dogma, the Right tends to hold as a matter of fact that there is enough and more than enough sinfulness both actual and potential lying about, as it were, in human nature to render experiments highly dangerous. Even when he is not downright wicked, the average man, on this estimate, is vain, foolish, credulous and irrational, capable when roused of frightful destructiveness and monstrous cruelty. In these circumstances, it is wise to let the sleeping dogs of human nature lie, instead of disturbing and exciting them by artificially engendered change, and encouraging men to aspire beyond their stature by promises of betterment which are probably incapable of fulfilment. It is the part of wisdom to hold things as they are rather than to risk the solid advantages accruing from such few goods as have been achieved, stability, order and a measure of political justice, by pursuing chimerical schemes for doubtful betterment. Order, then, is more to be valued than liberty not because it is liberty's antithesis, but because its maintenance is a guarantee of liberty's reasonable observance.

*Shaw's Early Political Attitude*

Now, there is not the slightest doubt that on the issue presented by these two alternatives Shaw's weight was originally thrown on the side of the Left. He inherited the attitude of the Victorian radical reformers, an attitude which, seen at its best in such men as Bentham and John Stuart Mill, reflects a faith in the teachability and improvability of man. The following quotation from John Stuart Mill's autobiography summarises its extreme version. Writing of his father, James Mill, he tells us that "so complete was my father's reliance on the influence of reason over the minds of mankind, whenever it is allowed to reach them, that he felt as if all would be gained if the whole population were taught to read, if all sorts of opinions were allowed to be addressed to them by word and in writing, and if by means of a suffrage they could nominate a legislature to give effect to the opinions they adopted. . . ." Speaking of himself and his friends, J. S. Mill goes on to say that what they "principally thought of, was to alter other people's opinions; to make them believe according to evidence, and know what was their real interest, which, when they knew, they would, we thought, by the instrument of opinion, enforce a regard to it upon one another."

Shaw's work as a Fabian and a Socialist, his work for the Labour Party, his work as a St. Pancras vestryman, all reflect this view. If he laced the pure, political milk of nineteenth-century, reformist radicalism with a strong dose of economic collectivism, that was no more than a testimony to the fact that Marx had written and the twentieth century had arrived.

For it was not, he taught, sufficient to educate, to argue and to remonstrate and then to leave reason to do her work unaided; it was also necessary to bring to the assistance of reason the influence of environmental conditions.

Now, better environmental conditions were symbolised, for Shaw, by more money. This is the argument of

Shaw's contribution, *The Economic Basis of Socialism*, to Fabian Essays. In a close analysis on lines which, under the name of Marxism, have subsequently become familiar of Rent, Profit and Exchange Value, he indicts capitalism on the ground that it leaves the propertyless masses with no alternative but that of selling their labour to the highest bidder. In accepting the bid, the worker "sells himself openly into bondage," since the highest bid will under capitalism be only a bare subsistence wage, all the profits of the workers' labour in excess of this minimum being appropriated by the capitalist who owns the means of production. Hence, under capitalism gross poverty is and must remain the lot of the mass of men. Now poverty, Shaw was already urging in 1889—the thesis was later to be developed with matchless eloquence in the preface to *Major Barbara*[1]—is the source of most of the social vices, of "filth, ugliness, dishonesty, disease, obscenity, drunkenness and murder"; poverty, in fact, is the evil of the poor.

But how was poverty to be attacked and overcome, unless poor men could be induced to use their votes to send representatives to Parliament to carry through those Socialist measures upon the execution of which the abolition of poverty depended? To abolish poverty it was necessary so to plan the resources of the community that they might be most fruitfully developed and so to administer them that they might be most equitably distributed. Now, the necessary condition of such planning and distribution was the ownership by the community of the resources planned and distributed, was, therefore, the achievement of Socialism!

And since poor men were after all the vast majority of citizens, there was no reason in the nature of things why, if the minds of poor men were trained and educated, if they were given access to facts and made free of the world of argument and opinion, they should

[1] See Chapter VIII, pp. 235, 236, for a development of Shaw's argument.

not be brought to realise that the solution of their economic discontents lay in their own hands, and was, in fact, the election to the legislature of a majority committed to the adoption of a Socialist programme informed by Fabian thinking. Such I take to have been Shaw's original political faith, nor, so far as its attitude to ordinary men and women were concerned, was it very different from the political faith of Bentham and John Stuart Mill.

*Shaw and Plato*

At some point between the beginning of the century and the first World War, this faith began to falter. To what its weakening was due we do not know, but by the time *Man and Superman* appeared in 1903 the original Shavian view was already in process of supersession. Shaw, in fact, had ceased to believe in progress or, more precisely, in the achievement of progress through the ordinary democratic machinery of election by the masses of a majority of representatives imbued by the will and possessed of the capacity to carry out the changes that Socialism entailed. Some have ascribed the change to Shaw's reading of Plato's *Republic*, and there is, it is obvious, a striking affinity between Plato and Shaw. Both are fundamentally rationalist; both dislike enthusiasm; both are distrustful of poetry and romance; both are temperamentally unsympathetic to the common man; they are revolted by the vulgarity of his tastes and wearied by his incorrigible irrationality. It is because his reason is the slave of appetite and desire, because its conclusions are distorted by his wishes that, Plato urges—and Shaw is presently found to be agreeing with him—the common man is incapable of "true philosophy," that is to say, of seeing things as they are and of valuing them as they should be valued. There is a natural fastidiousness in both Shaw and Plato which renders them incapable either of forgetting or forgiving the "earthiness" of common men. I cannot

think of any writer outside the ranks of the religious orders who has been less indulgent to common frailties and failings. It is almost as if these two great men had been born with a spiritual skin too few, so continuously and violently are they affronted by the natural human insufficiencies which most of us have learnt to take for granted. Each implies even if he does not explicitly assert, that, if the common man is the best that can be contrived in the way of humanity, we may as well despair of our species; each, therefore, has his own recipe for superseding the common man.

*Plato's Ideal Community*

Plato's recipe is education, but it is education of a peculiar kind, whose validity depends upon the acceptance of an elaborate and distinctive metaphysical system. There is, Plato intimates, an order of reality other than that of the familiar world, an order wherein resides a number of immaterial forms or principles, more particularly those of Truth, Goodness, Beauty and Justice. These enter into and manifest themselves in the things of the familiar world, bestowing upon them the features and qualities which they exhibit. Thus, it is because of the presence in them of the form of whiteness that snow and milk are white; it is because they participate in the forms of Goodness and Justice that men's characters exhibit such virtue, their institutions such justice, as belong to them. But the form is obscured and distorted by the subject matter, Plato's flux of "becoming," in which it is embodied. Hence, the things of this world are never complete realisations of the forms to whose manifestation they owe the characteristics which they exhibit. It follows that the whiteness of the snow, the moral virtue of a good man, the justice of a good institution are approximate only.

In so far as the forms which are manifested in this world are forms of value, are, in fact, Truth, Goodness, Beauty and Justice, the doctrines, things, people and

institutions which exhibit them possess value in respect of the degree to which they embody the forms.

Plato held that it was possible by appropriate education to elevate the soul of man to a level of insight at which it could achieve a knowledge of the forms. The education required was not only of the mind but of the character. It involved a mastery of the passions and a withdrawal from most of the avocations of ordinary life. Persons so educated, Plato's philosopher-kings, were entrusted with the management of the State. Having viewed the forms and made acquaintance, therefore, with the perfect patterns of Justice and Goodness, they proceed to embody these in the laws and institutions of society. A society organised on these lines is, then, the best that the mind of man can contrive and the life it enjoins the best that man can live.

Only a few are capable of achieving a vision of the forms; to the many this is denied. All that we are, therefore, entitled to demand of the many is that they should live conformably to the laws and institutions which the philosopher-kings have framed. To this end, that they may live contentedly in that sphere of life and according to that mode of activity for which they are fitted by their natural endowments, the education of the many is directed. They are to be taught to revere the things that the State reveres and to censure the things that the State censures; so only, Plato intimates, will they be able to attain that degree of happiness, albeit on a comparatively lowly plane, of which their natures are capable.

The scheme, as I have outlined it, is authoritarian. The best rule and the rest find both their duty and their happiness in subjecting themselves to the laws and carrying out the intentions of the best. Its tendencies are, moreover, politically Right in the sense of the term "Right" defined above. People, Plato intimates, cannot be trusted to think and to plan for themselves; they are too stupid, too irrational, too subject to impulse,

desire and appetite; therefore, they must be thought and planned for. Experiments based on popular demand must be eschewed, lest, in carrying them out, those goods which have been so hardly won and are so precariously maintained, security, order and relative unity, are prejudiced.

It is obvious that both the authoritarianism and the conservatism can be justified by reference to the scheme of metaphysics from which they derive; in my view, they can only be so justified. Granted the metaphysical scheme, the rest follows logically enough. Without it, both the political and the educational proposals are indistinguishable from what we have now learnt to call totalitarian tyranny.

*The Search for the Superman*

Sharing, as he came to share, Plato's conviction of the frailty and fallibility of ordinary men, Shaw rejected his metaphysics. He is as sceptical as Plato as to the ability of ordinary men to govern themselves and in his later period believed, no more than Plato believed, in the possibility of man's improvement; indeed, he is presently found to be vigorously denying that man has progressed at all. As Chesterton puts it, by the time *Man and Superman* had appeared, Shaw was contending "that ninety-nine hundredths of a man in a cave were the same as ninety-nine hundredths of a man in a suburban villa."

Nevertheless, Shaw rejects Plato's recipe for the production of extraordinary men by education. "Fancy," he writes, "trying to produce a greyhound or a race-horse by education!" What, then, is the recipe for man's salvation or, if the word be thought too picturesque, for man's future development? Shaw's answer is that extraordinary men must be bred.

*Shaw and Nietzsche*

At this point we meet another influence upon Shaw's thought, the influence of Nietzsche. Yet influence, I suspect, may be too strong a word. Shaw, indeed,

repudiates it, complaining, in the passage in the preface to *Major Barbara* entitled "First Aid to Critics," that when he expresses ideas which obviously derive from Butler, he is met with nothing but "vague cacklings about Ibsen and Nietzsche." Nor, indeed, is Nietzsche's conception of the Superman either clear or striking enough to be entitled to a claim to have influenced anybody, amounting as it does to not much more than the assertion that Life, or Fate, or God, or Zarathustra, or whoever it may be, will ultimately produce something or somebody greater than man. What the word "greater" stands for in this connection is not clear, but the general notion conveyed seems to be that the Superman would be (*a*) morally more desirable, in the Greek rather than the Christian sense of morals, would, that is to say, be braver, stronger, more valiant, more determined and more beautiful, but not necessarily more unselfish, considerate, just or compassionate than ordinary men, and (*b*) that by virtue of his possession of these "morally" superior qualities he would be entitled to hold and would in fact hold rule over ordinary men. Therefore, Nietzsche suggested, we ought to pray, work and strive, in ways which are never made as clear as could be wished, in order that the Superman may come.

To this conception there are, as Chesterton pointed out, two objections.

Either the process by which the Superman is evolved is determined and inevitable, or it is not. If it is, why pray, work and strive? Why, in fact, worry any more than the apes worried prior to the appearance of man? Is there any reason to suppose that, by taking thought, we can accelerate the process? If not, we might just as well rest on our oars and let evolution take its course.

If the process is not inevitable, if it rests with us to produce the Superman, or at least to accelerate his production by selective breeding, or, more simply, by working, praying, willing and striving, what sort of Superman do we want, and which qualities, therefore,

should we seek to breed? If the answer to this is the qualities which Christianity has historically praised, justice, mercy, pity, love, compassion, then the doctrine has nothing new or distinctive to offer. We all know that we should try to be juster, more merciful, more compassionate, less selfish than we are, and that we should acclaim and look up to those who are exceptional in respect of their possession of these qualities and seek to increase their number. If the answer is, some other set of qualities, as for example, greater resolution, determination and capacity, greater will to acquire and greater skill in exercising power, the question is whether we want people with these qualities, and if so, why we should want them. Do such people on the whole produce happiness or contribute to virtue? It is perhaps easier to-day than it was in the last quarter of the nineteenth or the first decade of the twentieth century, when Nietzsche propounded and Shaw subsequently flirted with these doctrines, to answer with a clear negative.

Now, of these two objections, Shaw's Life Force philosophy met the first with some measure of success. The Life Force, he asserted, aimed at superseding man, but could supersede him only if man, the latest vehicle which it had contrived for its expression, assisted it to produce something higher than man. Sometimes indeed —although this, as I have suggested in the chapter on his philosophy,[1] is not, I think, Shaw's general view— he argues as if the Life Force has no mind, no will and no purpose save such as are expressed in and through living organisms in general and human beings in particular. To put the point theologically, the Life Force, on this view, is wholly immanent and not transcendent.

To the second question, however, Shaw never succeeded in giving a satisfactory answer, nor, failing some provision for the presence in the universe of standards or factors of real and absolute value which include elements of absolute ethical value, is it easy to see what form an

[1] See Chapter VII, pp. 179, 180.

answer could take. Shaw's Ancients, who are as "far as thought can reach," are not remarkable for moral virtue. *Their* claim to respect is founded on power of intellect and intensity of awareness, but it is not clear what they do with their intellects or upon what their intensely conscious awareness is directed.[1] Now, it is, I think, obvious that the notion of *morally* superior beings presupposes some absolute standard of morality by reference to which their superiority is assessed. And of such a standard there is no hint anywhere in Shaw's writings.

*Shaw's Welcome to the Dictators*

These matters belong to Shaw's philosophy and will be pursued in the next chapter.

Here we are concerned with the political implications of the doctrine of the Superman and it is, I venture to think, in respect of these that Shaw lays himself open to criticism.

Granted Plato's metaphysical system, granted, in other words, that there exist in the universe independent standards of goodness and principles of justice, granted, too, that men may know them, then a case may be made out for authoritarian politics, since it is not unreasonable to demand that such men should govern the State. Granted, again, that you can find some meaning in Nietzsche's concept of the Superman, then it might reasonably be urged that one who overtopped his fellows in energy, initiative, capacity, resolution and vision, should command them. (The point is, I dare say, academic in the sense that such a one would in all probability assume command over his fellows, without pausing to find out whether a convincing case had been made out in favour of his doing so, or not.)

But until the Superman arrives—what then? What line are we to take in regard to politics in the interim?

Now, it is Shaw's answer to this question that has

[1] See Chapter VII, pp. 193–196, for a development of this criticism.

proved a stumbling block to so many Shavian enthusiasts. For his practice has been to regard anybody who was in *de facto* possession of power over his fellows as a candidate for the *rôle* of Superman. Again and again he has taken up his pen in his support, praising his character, commending his actions and policy and, where actions and policy were, to say the least, doubtful, giving him the benefit of the doubt, while at the same time losing no chance of crying down democracy, stressing the incompetence and knavery of the people's representatives, and consistently clamouring for the rule of superior persons not chosen by the people.

In the preceding chapter I have dwelt on the fascination which the concept of the great man and more particularly of the great ruler has always exercised over Shaw's mind. In Cæsar, I have suggested, he has drawn a plausible, even a convincing picture of what it means to be a great man. Now, I venture to suggest that it was this partiality of his for great rulers, coupled with what it is now customary to call wishful thinking—Shaw gives one the impression that he was constantly on the look-out for a sign that the Superman had arrived—that led him to acclaim first Mussolini and then Hitler and through a number of embarrassing and uncomfortable years to play the part of their apologist.

*Argument of The Apple Cart and On the Rocks*

The lines on which Shaw's thought was developing first received dramatic expression in *The Apple Cart* (1930) where the ruler, King Magnus, is portrayed as being competent where his ministers are incompetent, knowledgeable where they are ignorant, serious and dignified where they are clownish and quarrelsome. Further, the fact that his position does not depend upon the favour of the electorate enables Shaw to present him as advocating measures upon which the well-being of the community depends, in contradistinction to his ministers who, with their thoughts centred on the

constituencies, are forced to propose legislation which will be immediately popular. Above all, King Magnus is depicted as an expert or professional in government, if only because he has been engaged on the job for so much longer than his ministers who come and go, while the throne is represented as constituting an elevated point of vantage from which all the multitudinous strands which go to the making of the pattern of a complex, modern community can be seen in their right perspective. Shaw loses no opportunity of contrasting this professionalism with the amateurishness of the ministers.

The insistence on the complexity of the modern community is a legacy from Shaw's Fabian-Socialist days. Fabians had taken the field as the denouncers of *laissez-faire* economics, and from the first had emphasised the need for planning. As society grew more complex, *laissez-faire* became increasingly unworkable and the need to plan more imperative, so much so that over a large and increasing area of public business *laissez-faire* had by the 'thirties to all intents and purposes been abandoned. The following passage from the preface to *The Apple Cart* where Shaw emphasises what he takes to be the distinguishing characteristics of a modern community illustrates this emphasis:

> "Government, which used to be a comparatively simple affair, to-day has to manage an enormous development of Socialism and Communism. Our industrial and social life is set in a huge communistic framework of public roadways, streets, bridges, water supply, power supply, lighting, tramways, schools, dockyards, and public aids and conveniences, employing a prodigious army of police inspectors, teachers, and officials in all grades in hundreds of departments."

The press of business which bears upon the modern State exhibits the traditional method of transacting the affairs of State by Acts of Parliament which are debated clause by clause and line by line before they are finally

passed after a number of readings, as increasingly inadequate, the truth being, according to Shaw, that, in so far as the function of government may be properly regarded as the making of laws, the procedure of Parliament is a hindrance and not a help to its performance.

This line of thought develops into a general attack on the methods of democratic election. How, Shaw asks in effect, can you expect those who are sent into Parliament by our present haphazard system of election, a system which confers upon the electorate not so much the right of election—for it is a delusion that the electors actually *choose* the men who descend upon them at election times to solicit their suffrages from the clouds of the party offices in London—but the right to reject every five years the most unsuitable of two or three more or less unsuitable persons who offer themselves for your vote. And by what considerations are the electors influenced in their assessment of suitability? By the ability of the candidate to make convincing promises, to arouse the passions and above all to flatter the prejudices of the electors.

Now there is no reason why the possession of these qualities should connote the administrative and executive ability which the transaction of the complex affairs of the modern State requires. It would be much better, Shaw argues, to leave the task to a competent civil service acting under the direction of a ruler, who, even if he is very far from being a Superman, has by virtue of his training and experience acquired a knowledge of affairs and a habit of administration to which the ephemeral representatives of the popular will, elected by haphazard every few years, cannot aspire.

Again and again, in *The Apple Cart* and *On the Rocks*, these criticisms are urged. Parliaments are accused of talking instead of doing, and Ministers are represented as wasting their time and frittering their energies in meeting arguments and combating opposition, when

they ought to be governing. The questions which they are represented as putting to themselves are not: "Is this what the present emergency demands?" or, even, "Is this right?", but "Will this win votes?" "Will this please?" "Will this arouse opposition?" Hence eloquence and skill in argument come to be more highly valued in politicians than firmness, judgment, knowledge, and vision.

The party system is singled out for additional criticism on the ground that under it each successive Government seeks to undo the work of its predecessor.

All this does not necessarily lead to the conclusion[1] that Parliament should be superseded; merely that it is to be recognised for what it is, a "talking shop," whose only useful function is that of a safety valve for the expression of popular discontents. Shaw contemptuously dismisses the idea that anyone who possesses any pretensions to originality of mind should wish to enter such an assembly. Hence his warning in a letter to me, quoted on an earlier page,[2] that entry into Parliament "means a frightful waste of years in the degradation of electioneering and then extinction."

There is, of course, substance in this point of view. As I argue below, nobody who has any knowledge of politics, supposes that democracy is an ideal method of government. The most that can be said in its favour is that it is less dangerous than any of its rivals. Democracy, in short, is at best the best of a bad bunch. Shaw, moreover, is clearly entitled to make the most of democracy's failings and to use his dialectical skill to put the case against democracy with his customary force and eloquence.

What those whose political views had been moulded by Shaw found it hard to forgive was the welcome he accorded to the Fascist dictators. It seemed to us that in order to make his case Shaw wilfully ignored certain

[1] At least it does not in the plays to which I am here referring, but, as Shaw's thought developed, his hostility to democracy increased.

[2] See Chapter II, p. 40.

features of their *régimes* which had shocked the imagination of civilised mankind. Facts which thousands far less acute than himself had apprehended, outrages by which thousands far less sensitive than himself were revolted, seemed to escape his notice.

*Shaw on Popular Psychology*

For example, more eloquently than any man of his generation Shaw had taught us the value of liberty—"Liberty," he once declared, "is the breath of nations"—but in his later utterances he apparently wished them to breathe no more, since we presently find him proposing to deprive peoples of the power to govern themselves or even to choose their own governors, their choice being limited to those who are "public-spirited and politically talented."[1] Government of the people is necessary; government for the people possible; but government *by* the people, he was arguing in the 'thirties, is a patent impossibility, since people have neither the ability nor the desire to govern themselves.

So far from wishing to exercise his political initiative, the ordinary man, Shaw maintained, "only wants to know what to do," and is prepared to accept as an authority whoever has the courage to tell him. As with action, so with thought. Tell the ordinary man what to believe, and he will be no less grateful than if you tell him how to behave. That is why the Church and the Army have always been his two most popular institutions. In fact, Shaw urged, the belief that the ordinary man wants freedom is a delusion. He is ready and anxious, as he has always been, to get his moral and political beliefs, as he gets his boots and clothes, ready-made from the social shop. So intolerable does he find it to make up his own mind on moral and political questions, that he is willing to regard any dogma as embodying the last word in absolute truth, and any code of morals as constituting a final and unquestioned

[1] See p. 168, below.

criterion of right and wrong, if it is presented to him with a sufficiently authoritative backing. What is more, he will be prepared, if put to it, to defend the code and the dogma to the last ounce of his energy and the last drop of his blood, regarding it as the height of wickedness to act and think otherwise than in accordance with them and inflicting appalling cruelties upon all who venture to do so.

How does this view of popular psychology bear upon politics? The people are still in essence what Burke called them—"the swinish multitude." They need not liberty, but discipline; they crave a leader and a master. Whoever, asked Shaw parenthetically, heard of a democratic God? It follows that the ordinary citizen tends to vote for men rather than for measures, and, having found a Man for his leader, he will follow him at all costs. Leaders being necessary, the people's only concern with government is to ensure that they get the best available.

Possibly, possibly not; but was there ever any reason to suppose that Mussolini and Hitler, whom Shaw called "a born leader," were even remotely eligible candidates for the title of "the best"? Shaw himself, we must suppose, could hardly have been taken in. How then, one asks oneself, explain the almost unremitting support which in his later writings he went out of his way to accord to the Fascist dictators? Nor were we reassured when before the war he paid a visit to Russia in the company of the Astors and returned full of admiration for the Soviet *régime* in general and for Stalin in particular. It is hard to believe that Shaw was so blind to the conditions prevailing in Russia that he really supposed Soviet Russia to be a land of humanitarian light and leading; yet, it is harder still, in the light of many of his well-known declarations of opinion, to explain his support of the Soviet *régime*. Hesketh Pearson in his biography of Shaw, gives a list of some of these pronouncements: "Progress depends on our

refusal to use brutal means even when they are efficacious." "A civilisation cannot progress without criticism, and must therefore, to save itself from stagnation and putrefaction, declare impunity for criticism." "Civic education does not mean education in blind obedience to authority, but education in controversy and liberty . . . in scepticism, in discontent and betterment. . . ." "No single criminal can be as powerful for evil, or as unrestrained in its exercise, as an organised nation . . . it legalises its crimes, and forges certificates of righteousness for them, besides torturing any one who dares expose their true character." Finally, Hesketh Pearson quotes Shaw's remark on leaving Russia: "Had we not better teach our children to be better citizens than ourselves? We are not doing that at present. The Russians *are*," and contrasts it with the famous definition from *The Revolutionist's Handbook*: "The vilest abortionist is he who attempts to mould a child's character. . . ."

*Shaw's Failure with the Younger Generation*

It goes hard with one who has admired Shaw as much as I have done, and admires him as much as I still do, to raise these doubts and to make by implication these strictures. Yet they are, I think, strictly germane to the general theme of this book, the impact of Shaw upon a particular generation, and upon a sample mind of that generation, because they serve to explain why, so far at any rate as his political philosophy is concerned, he failed to make a similar impact upon the succeeding generation, failing so notably that by the time the late 'thirties had arrived, he had come to be regarded by the young intellectuals of the Left as a long-winded old bore who for some unaccountable reason was carrying on an intellectual flirtation with the dictators.

Shaw's inability to evoke an equivalent hero-worship in the alert and critically minded young men of the 'thirties and 'forties was no doubt in part a testimony to a development of thought for which he was himself responsible.

Shaw was a pioneer. To put it as he would have put it himself, he was a biological "sport" on the planes of morals and politics, a "sport," moreover, which bred true. It was only natural that succeeding generations should presently move up to the level from which he had first addressed their parents and take his standpoint as much for granted, as if they had discovered it for themselves. During the first half of the twentieth century many of the causes, once unpopular, for which Shaw had stood, many of the opinions, once eccentric, that he had expressed, had become the adopted policies of the State and passed into the intellectual currency of the time. As Mr. Raymond Mortimer points out in an article written in May, 1947, Shaw "has lived to see many of his paradoxes deaden into platitudes. His Fabian opinions have become Government policy. The public health service is replacing his old butt, the private practitioner; the divorce laws and the penal system (though inadequately) have been reformed. The vote has been given to women; self-government to the Irish, and while there is still censorship of plays, it is no longer formidable."

That subsequent generations should have come to take for granted opinions that seemed to us novel to the point of paradox and subversive to the point of revolution was in the circumstances only to be expected. It is the Nemesis that waits upon those who tell the truth for the first time, that after a time we should conclude that we have always known what they told us, so that the young, looking out on the world through spectacles that Shaw and Wells had tinted for them, instinctively saw the world in Shaw's and Wells's colours. This precisely is the process by which paradoxes dwindle into platitudes.

All this, I say, was natural enough and Shaw would have been the last to resent a development which was a tribute to the influence which his thought had exercised.

But another factor came into play to damp the

enthusiasm of the generation which had grown up to regard Shaw as a prophet, to reverence him as a revolutionary and to rejoice in him as a wit. This factor was his, to us, inexplicable overtures to the dictators. I doubt if Shaw was ever fully conscious of the extent to which his later political writings caused him to "lose face" not only with many young men of the 'thirties but even with the stalwarts of my own generation. "For years past," he wrote at the beginning of the last war, "with an unprecedented pertinacity and obstinacy I have been dinning into the public head that I am an extraordinarily, witty, brilliant, clever man. That is now part of public opinion and no power in heaven or earth will ever change it. I may dodder and dote, I may potboil and platitudinise, I may become butt and chopping block of all bright spirits of a rising generation, but my reputation will not suffer." I believe this estimate of his influence couched, as it is, in the audacious phraseology which had so endeared Shaw to us in the past, when he was tilting at and not bolstering up the big battalions of government, to have been strictly untrue, at any rate at the time when it was written.

Yet, when all is said that can be said on this score, one cannot, I repeat, wholly avoid a feeling of guilt at venturing upon even the mildest of strictures of one to whom so many of us—and not least myself—have owed so much. It is as if we were lacking in proper respect for our own parent. It is this feeling which impels me to try to justify what I have said by taking a typical piece of late Shavian political writing and subjecting it to critical scrutiny. As the examination will be intensive, it is better that the piece should be short.

*Detailed Examination of a Piece of Shavian Political Writing*

I propose, therefore, to select for treatment the preface which Shaw wrote in 1945 to the volume of plays, *Geneva*, *Cymbeline Refinished* and *Good King Charles*, which was published in 1946. The views expressed are

admittedly those of a very old, many would say of a disillusioned, man; they could, however, be paralleled from many longer and more closely argued passages from the prefaces to *The Apple Cart* and *On the Rocks* and from *Everybody's Political What's What.*

*Grounds for Shaw's Attack on Democracy*

I have already noted as a distinctive feature of Shaw's later political views his hostility to democracy. On what is this based? To answer this question I propose to select a number of statements from the above mentioned preface and to offer comments. "Democracy," he says, is based "on an assumption that every adult native is either a Marcus Aurelius or a combination of St. Teresa and Queen Elizabeth Tudor, supremely competent to choose any tinker, tailor, soldier, sailor, or any good-looking, well-dressed female to rule over them." My comment is that democracy is based upon no such assumption. Nobody in his senses, that is to say, entertains the supposition which Shaw attributes to democrats that the ordinary citizen is either particularly wise or particularly virtuous, and nobody denies that he or she may vote for foolish and self-interested persons and is liable to succumb to the passions and to be swept by the hysterias of the mob. What we do maintain is that in spite of these obvious facts, (i) people should elect their governors not because they, the electors, are wise but because only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches and those who have to obey the laws should, therefore, choose those who are to make the laws which they will have to obey and should thus indirectly determine what laws are made; (ii) that though ordinary people are unwise, morally defective and very variously endowed, they are, nevertheless, all equally important to themselves and it is, therefore, the State's business to treat them as if they were all equally important to it, a contention which entails equality before the law; (iii) that a form of government

which embodies and observes these two principles, though faulty in all sorts of respects, is less faulty than any of the alternatives that human beings have yet devised; that, in short, while all government is evil, democracy is the least evil of all forms of government.

Shaw continues "this insane prescription for perfect democracy of course makes democracy impossible and the adventures of Cromwell, Napoleon, Hitler and the innumerable conquistadores and upstart presidents of South American history inevitable." The comment seems to be that it does nothing of the sort; it has not, for example, made democracy impossible in England, where *political* democracy has existed for some 250 years. It is significant that Shaw has to go back for 300 years to find the last English dictator who, incidentally, was produced not by the excesses of democracy but by the misuse of monarchical power. The examples of England and, I venture to add, of America also make nonsense of other remarks couched in a similar vein, such as "the rule of the monarch was succeeded by the rule of anybody chosen by everybody, supposed, as usual, to secure the greatest common measure of welfare, which is the object of democracy, but which really means that a political career is open to any adventurer," or "adult suffrage, which is finally so destructive of democracy, that it ends in a reaction into despotic idolatry."

The fact is that no *successful* political career has been open to mere adventurers in England for several centuries. Moreover, although Shaw's use of the word "finally" in the second quotation may convict of rashness any confident denial of the statement which the quotation contains, it is worth pointing out that democracy has provoked no reaction into "despotic idolatry" in this country as yet, nor does it show any signs of doing so.

Similarly wild statements are that "the mobs" which, presumably—the sense is unfortunately not quite clear—are responsible for the election of "the futile parliamentary talking shops" are the "products of political

idolatry and ignorance" and "the wider the suffrage, the greater the confusion."

As regards the first statement, the inappropriateness of its application to the membership of a local Labour Party or trade union lodge, composed as it commonly is of sceptical, experienced men and women, long habituated to the administration of affairs, and imbued with a traditional suspicion of "great men," is obvious to anybody who has the slightest acquaintance with British Labour's manner of speaking and voting and generally conducting its affairs.

As regards the second, the introduction of male suffrage in the latter part of the nineteenth century was followed by an increase both in the stability and in the dignity of English political life. Since full adult suffrage was realised by the granting of votes to women there has been a diminution of both dignity and stability, but this is due not to the circumstance of women's voting but to the occurrence of war followed by economic crisis. It might, of course, be plausibly maintained that the truth or falsehood of Shaw's contentions depends upon the precise sense in which such words as "democracy" and "adventurer" are used, but, as Shaw does not himself define the senses in which he is using them, he cannot legitimately cavil at my using them without definition in what I take to be their normal senses.

*Has Man Improved in Political Capacity?*

Shaw adduces in support of his attack on democracy the contention that "all the evidence available . . . is to the effect that since the dawn of history there has been no change in the natural political capacity of the human species." I can see little ground for this statement. Without going back to Neanderthal man or to the owner of the Piltdown skull, it is, I should have thought, obvious that a collection of central African pygmies, a group of Australian aborigines or a mob of Dervishes

is definitely inferior in respect of its capacity to call and conduct orderly meetings at which opinions can be expressed, policies formulated and decisions taken representing the collective will of the gathering or of the majority of the gathering, to a self-governing W.E.A. class, to a synod of the ministers and elders of a Presbyterian church, to a trade union lodge, a village cricket club, a university debating society or a divisional Labour Party. I do not know how to prove this statement; it seems to me self-evident.

*Shaw's Remedy*

When we come to the question of substitutes for democracy and remedies for the plight into which it is alleged to have led us, Shaw's attitude is even more unsatisfactory. Since government of the people is necessary, government for the people desirable, but government by the people, in his view, disastrous, Shaw proceeds very naturally to demand, "impartial government for the good of the governed by qualified rulers." How are these persons to be chosen? The answer is by the people. "Genuine democracy," of which Shaw presumably approves because it is genuine and not fake, "requires that the people shall choose their rulers, and, if they will, change them at sufficient intervals; but the choice must be limited to the public-spirited and politically talented, of whom Nature always provides not only the necessary percentage, but superfluity enough to give the people a choice." How are these "public-spirited" and "politically talented" persons to be recognised in order that they may be chosen? We are not told; or, rather, we *are* told that there are *no* trustworthy methods of recognition and selection: "when we face the democratic task of forming panels of the persons eligible for choice as qualified rulers we find, first, that none of our tests are trustworthy or sufficient." It is for this reason, presumably, that Shaw insists that "we have no qualified rulers at all, only bosses."

He adds that the prevalence of "bosses" and absence of "qualified rulers" is due not so much to faulty selection as to the lack of suitable material, the fact of the matter being that none of us is really competent to govern—"the rule of vast commonwealths is beyond the political capacity of mankind at its ablest," a statement which certainly appears *prima facie* to contradict the preceding statement that Nature provides "superfluity enough to give the people a choice." The charge which Shaw brings against even the most competent rulers is that they are still children with the tastes of children who "die in their childhood as far as statesmanship is concerned, playing golf and tennis and bridge, smoking tobacco and drinking alcohol as part of their daily diet . . ." and exhibiting all the other tastes and characteristics of Shavian short-livers.

To give such people power is to give them a licence to indulge their childishness. Indeed, so alive is Shaw to the corrupting and enfeebling effects of power upon ordinary men and women that he attacks Acton's famous dictum on the ground that it is not strong enough: "Lord Acton's dictum that power corrupts gives no idea of the extent to which flattery, deference, power and apparently unlimited money, can upset and demoralise simpletons who in their proper places are good fellows enough. To them the exercise of authority is not a heavy and responsible job which strains their mental capacity and industry to the utmost, but a delightful sport to be indulged for its own sake, and asserted and re-asserted by cruelty and monstrosity."

*Shaw's Attitude to Democracy Illogical*

In the light of this terrific indictment Shaw's willingness to throw overboard the carefully built up checks and safeguards of democracy and to demand for his rulers powers which are sufficiently absolute to secure them against the fickle winds of popular favour is all the more surprising. Indeed, I can make no sense of

it. Either rulers are qualified to rule impartially, or they are not; if they are not, the familiar "cruelties and monstrosities" which history records of almost all undemocratic rulers may be expected. If they are—but then we have been explicitly told that there *are* no persons qualified to rule and that, even if there were, no tests exist whereby they may be selected! The position, then, if democracy is to be rejected is as follows: (i) we must have governors who are not prevented by the democratic system of checks, balances and safeguards from governing properly; (ii) these must not be ordinary childish men because they will abuse their powers; yet (iii) they cannot be properly qualified men because such do not exist.

What then? To answer this question Shaw has recourse to his Methuselaism. One day, if all goes well with the Life Force, some of us will begin to live longer, long enough, in fact, to become politically mature; we shall then be qualified to govern. How long such men will have to live in order that they may qualify as rulers is uncertain, but Shaw hazards at a guess three hundred years: "How long, then, would it take us to mature into competent rulers of great modern States instead of, as at present, trying vainly to govern empires with the capacity of village headmen. In my Methuselah cycle I put it at three hundred years: a century of childhood and adolescence, a century of administration and a century of oracular senatorism." To the further question, how long we shall have to wait before we begin to live longer, no answer is given.

This being so, I suggest that the plain implication of Shaw's own argument is that we must contrive to make do with democracy as best we can since, on his own showing, every alternative would take us out of the frying-pan into the fire. To this conclusion I, too, subscribe. Hence, I venture to end these paragraphs of criticism with two questions.

First question, why does not Shaw explicitly accept

this conclusion himself? Second question, why does he continue to browbeat democracy when, given the existing span of human life, he has nothing better to offer?

*Subsidence of Shaw into a Fact-retailer*

I venture to add one comment on the whole performance. In apparent contradiction to most of the foregoing Shaw says that his "experience as an enlightener" has shown him that "the average citizen is not altogether deficient" in "political capacity," but that he *is* ignorant; he does not, it seems, know the facts. This ignorance of the facts Shaw has, he says, done his best to remedy in his capacity of "enlightener." That is why, "when I am not writing plays as a more or less inspired artist, I write political school books in which I say nothing of the principles of Socialism or any other ism (I disposed of all that long ago), and try to open my readers' eyes to the political facts under which they live. I cannot change their minds; but I can increase their knowledge." Shaw, then, now doubts the power of ideas to change men's minds, whether because ideas are no longer, for him, potent forces or because he has come to doubt the average citizen's power to take them in in spite of his not "altogether deficient political capacity," is not clear. What is clear is that Shaw, according to his own account, now confines his political activities to retailing facts. Resisting the temptation to point out that some at least of the facts are, as I have tried to show, not facts at all, I cannot refrain from commenting upon the grievous spectacle of the abdication of Shaw's reason, or rather of his belief in its power. Shaw, the prince of rationalists,[1] has abdicated his office and discarded the weapon of reason. The instrument, it seems, has broken in his hands. Instead, he has assumed the *rôle* of the encyclopædia, the card index, the history book and the blue book. It is hard

[1] See Chapter IV, pp. 60–63.

not to regret the transformation of the reasoner into the fact-retailer; at least, it would have been hard, if Shaw had undergone it. But, of course, he has not undergone anything of the kind. . . .

## CHAPTER VII

# SHAW'S PHILOSOPHY

### *Nature and Sources of Shaw's Philosophy*

THERE ARE TWO SENSES in which a man can be said to have a philosophy or to be a philosopher. First, there is the sense in which he may seek to present a coherent and comprehensive view of the universe as a whole, of the status of human life within it and of the way in which, in the light of that view and granted that status, human life ought to be lived.

Secondly, there is the sense in which a man may be the dispenser of wisdom in memorable thoughts and sayings on a vast number of topics of perennial importance—on God, money, love, marriage, desire, death, ambition—wisdom which may, as in Shaw's case, spring from and be informed by the coherent and comprehensive view; or, as in that of Dr. Johnson, be unrelated to any synthesising conception of the meaning and purpose of life as a whole. (I don't mean that Johnson did not entertain such a conception, merely that it has little to do with what he has to say on money, marriage, the navy and so on.) Shaw is a philosopher and has a philosophy in both these senses. In this chapter I shall be concerned only with the first of them, the sense in which he is the exponent and part originator of the philosophical doctrine called Creative Evolution.

Although this philosophy outcrops sporadically throughout the plays, its main deposits are to be found in the preface to and the Hell scene in *Man and Superman*,

and in the preface to and the five plays of the *Back to Methuselah* pentateuch. These represent a distinct advance on the doctrines of *Man and Superman* in a number of salient particulars and may be taken as the most fully developed statement of Shaw's doctrine of Creative Evolution.

*The Materialist Scheme*

I will, first, say something of the background and sources of Shaw's theory. Shaw's thought runs back through Samuel Butler to Lamarck. The view that Butler expounded can best be understood in relation to the doctrine of Darwin. Darwin's doctrine was essentially biological, but it formed an integral part of the comprehensive materialist view of the universe which held the field in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Those who took this view envisaged the universe after the model of a gigantic clock; somebody at some time or other had, so to speak, wound the clock up; in other words the universe had at some time got itself started—the materialist could not, of course, explain how, but as nobody else was in this respect in any better position his inability was not a distinctive objection to materialism; thereafter it functioned indefinitely through the automatic interaction of its parts. Life was one of the parts, a product of the operation of the same physical and chemical laws as those which governed the behaviour of non-living matter.

Under the influence of certain specifiable but rare physical conditions—materialists were never tired of emphasising the paucity of the areas of the cosmos in which the conditions favourable to life obtained—matter had become conscious, conscious, as it was sometimes put, of itself. Matter's consciousness of itself was life, and life's subsequent development was governed by the same material conditions as had given it birth. One day when these conditions no longer obtained, life

would finish its pointless journey with as little significance as in the person of the amœba it began it. Meanwhile, its status in the universe was that of an outside passenger travelling across a fundamentally alien and hostile environment in which the mindless and the brutal conditioned and determined the living and the spiritual. Causation in other words operated universally from the less living as cause to the more living as effect, in the external world from the environment to the living organism, within the living organism from the body to the mind and within the mind from the less to the more conscious part of it.

This was the scheme in which Darwin's discovery of evolution, or, more precisely, his formulation of the laws of natural selection and the survival of the fittest by means of which evolution operated, played an integral part; integral, because in respect of the attitude which it adopted to the phenomenon of life, of the explanation which it offered of the elaborate and varied process which beginning with the amœba had culminated in ourselves, Darwin's account postulated the intervention of no spiritual force or agency, neither mind, life, nor creator, but was content to rely upon the operation of the same physical forces as those which had governed the development of our planet prior to life's appearance.

The relevant part of Darwin's account was concerned with the occurrence and subsequent history of variations. Variations in species occurred. Either they were adapted to their environment or they were not. If they were not, they were eliminated; if they were, the variation in respect of which they were adapted, and by reason of the adaptation obtained an advantage in the struggle for existence, was handed on to their offspring and became stamped into the life-history of the species. Thereafter it developed and became more marked, until at last it represented a degree of differentiation which entitled biologists to say that a new species had emerged. So far, so good; but why did the variations

occur? Darwin professed agnosticism; he did not know, although sometimes he attributed them to chance. But the question was, it was obvious, of crucial importance. If there were no variations, if no changes in species occurred, then each generation would be an exact replica of the preceding one and, short of new creations—and these, on the materialist view, could be ruled out—the amœba and its contemporaries would still be the sole forms of life upon the planet. Variations, then, played an essential part in the machinery of evolution; they were necessary to get it started. Why, then, did they occur? It was here that the followers of Lamarck took the field.

*Lamarckianism*

Variations in species, they urged, were due to the effects of environment. When the environment changed, when, for example, an ice age receded or the incidence of rainfall altered, living organisms must either adapt themselves to the change or disappear. Those who succeeded in effecting the necessary adaptation survived and transmitted the adaptation in virtue of which they had survived to their descendants. Adaptations were mainly envisaged by Lamarck in terms of the growth of new organs and the gradual lapsing of old ones. Changes in environment led to new wants, new wants to new habits and new habits to new organs which were formed to minister to the habits. In point of fact, the difference between Lamarck's doctrine, so far as I have stated it hitherto, and Darwin's was not very striking. Such as it was, it was thrown into relief by a contemporary controversy as to why the giraffe grew his long neck. According to Darwin's followers, long-necked giraffes were born by chance much as children with freckles are born by chance. They enjoyed a natural advantage in the struggle for food—they could nibble the leaves on the higher branches—and, therefore, were better placed in the struggle for existence than their shorter-necked contemporaries. Thus, the fittest survived but

they were the fittest by chance; they had not become the fittest by design. According to Lamarck, the giraffes, finding at a certain stage of their history that most of the leaves on the lower branches on the available trees had been eaten, were under the necessity of either growing longer necks in order to reach the higher leaves, or of perishing of hunger. Those who successfully adapted themselves to the changed conditions by growing longer necks survived and transmitted the characteristic of long-neckedness to their offspring. Once again in the struggle for existence the fittest survived, but they were the fittest not by chance but by reason of their success in adapting themselves. But the process was, on Lamarck's view, no less automatic, no less determined than on Darwin's; in fact, it was more so. A change in the external environment, a change, it might be, in the climate, determined a change in the living organisms which were exposed to it, or it did not. If it did not, the organisms died out. The scheme agreed with Darwin's in the important respect that it, too, abstained from postulating the action of any imforming purpose or plan to account for the changes in and development of species, and, as hitherto stated, it fitted equally well into the prevalent materialistic scheme.

*Butler's Contribution*

But suppose that the changes in living organisms by means of which they adapted themselves to changes in their environment were purposive, in the sense that somebody or something operating independently of the living organism, or perhaps using it as the vehicle of its own development, willed them; suppose, in fact, that changes in living things were not *always* the by-products of prior changes in dead things, but that at least sometimes they occurred independently as the expression of a drive in living things to adapt themselves better to dead things and possibly to use dead things for their

own purposes. If this were so, causation might sometimes at least operate from the animate to the inanimate, and the activity of living force or spirit by which animate matter was distinguished from inanimate, instead of being merely a by-product of matter, might be in some sense independent of it, and in virtue of its independence able to act upon it, use it, even enter into and inform it. Such, in effect, was the contention of Samuel Butler, a contention which he proceeded to work up into the sketch of a philosophy. It was of this sketch that Shaw proceeded to fill in the outlines, freely acknowledging his debt to Butler, "in his own department the greatest English writer of the latter half of the nineteenth century."

So much for a sketch of the background; let me now try and outline the philosophy with which the background was filled in.

*Outline of Shaw's Theory of Creative Evolution*

Shaw postulates a universe containing or consisting of two factors, life and matter. Admittedly, he sometimes speaks of life as creating matter as when, by willing to use our arms in a certain way, we bring into existence a roll of muscle, but the general view is that matter is, as it were, there to begin with. Thus, matter is spoken of as life's "enemy." "I brought life into the whirlpool of force, and compelled my enemy, Matter, to obey a living soul," says Lilith at the end of *Back to Methuselah.* Regarding matter in the light of an enemy, life seeks to dominate and subdue it. Partly to this end, partly because of its innate drive to self-expression, life enters into and animates matter. The result of this animation of matter by life is a living organism. A living organism, then, derives from and bears witness to the presence of both the fundamental constituents of which the universe is composed; it is life expressed in matter. Shaw suggests rather than explicitly states that life cannot evolve or develop *unless* it enters into matter to create organisms;

these are, in fact, the indispensable instruments wherewith it promotes its own development. To put the point in another way, by the device of expressing itself in and through matter life is enabled to enjoy a greater variety of experience, to acquire more faculties and greater intelligence and to develop a more intense power of awareness. To acquire new powers and faculties and so to extend its range of consciousness may be described as life's immediate purpose since these acquisitions facilitate, indeed, they constitute, the process of life's development. Living organisms, then, are the instruments which life creates to further the process of its own development, and matter, though life's enemy, is also, as it were, the whetstone upon which life sharpens itself in order that it may advance further. This office matter performs by reason of the limitation which it imposes upon the organism's existing powers, thus forcing it to make efforts to overcome the limitations and so to develop itself by the acquisition of new powers.

If this is the immediate, the ultimate object of life is to pass beyond matter: to pass, that is to say, beyond the necessity for incarnating itself in and concerning itself with matter. Until this consummation is reached, matter will continue to obstruct and limit life.

Life is also dependent on matter in the sense that each individual expression of life, being dependent upon the body in which life incarnates itself to constitute a living organism, terminates its separate existence *as an individual expression* with the death of the body, and, presumably, reverts to the main stream.

When the need for incarnation in matter has been transcended, life's individualised expressions, being no longer dependent upon incorporation in a body for their individuality will, we may deduce, become permanently individualised; will, in fact, be immortal. Such, at least, is the suggestion conveyed by the dialogue between the *Ancient* and the *Newly Born* in the last play of *Back to Methuselah*:

"THE HE-ANCIENT: For whilst we are tied to this tyrannous body we are subject to its death, and our destiny is not achieved.

"THE NEWLY-BORN: What is your destiny?

"THE HE-ANCIENT: To be immortal.

"THE SHE-ANCIENT: The day will come when there will be no people, only thought.

"THE HE-ANCIENT: And that will be life eternal."

This, unfortunately, is not as clear as could be wished, since it leaves us uncertain whether the immortality looked forward to will be the personal immortality of separate individual units of life, or will be merely the immortality of life as a whole. If it means the former, then life must be regarded merely as the sum total of those organisms which at any given moment happen to be living. If the latter, life is a force or activity which, while it expresses itself in living organisms, nevertheless transcends them.

On this latter view, life consists of a single unified force or activity *plus* the individualised expressions of that activity in living organisms.

As I hinted in an earlier chapter,[1] Shaw never seems to have made up his mind on this issue, and expressions consistent with both views may be found scattered up and down his work. His general attitude seems, however, to favour the latter view. If this is so, if that is to say, life is more than the sum total of its individual expressions, then it still remains an open question whether the immortality to which the Ancients look forward is individual or not, since even if life were a unified force which transcended the sum total of its individual expressions in living organisms, these might nevertheless achieve immortality *as individuals*. On this supposition, the unified force of life would continue to exist side by side, as it were, with its individual expressions which, however, would no longer be merely temporary.

[1] See Chapter VI, p. 154.

Against this view it may be argued, (1) that it is inherently unplausible and wasteful; and (2) that a Life Force which has transcended the need to objectify itself in matter has also, presumably, transcended the need to individuate itself in living organisms at all.

On the other hand, it might be said that a purely anonymous immortality, the immortality of a rivulet which flows into and is merged in a river, is not an inspiring goal for individual effort, and that if that is all that the evolutionary force has to offer to ordinary Short-Livers, one might well ask why they should be bothered, or why life, acting through them, should be bothered to evolve into Ancients? Indeed, the whole process remains on this supposition without any adequate goal or end. But in saying this I am anticipating criticisms which will be found below.[1]

*The Method of Evolution*

What is the nature of the force or activity which is spoken of sometimes as driving the evolutionary process forward, sometimes as identical with it, and how does it operate? We cannot say or, rather, we can define it only in terms of its own activity. It is, to use an expression of Shaw's, "vitality with a direction" expressing itself in the will to create matter or to mould the matter which it finds, but has not created. "The will to do anything," he writes, "can and does, at a certain pitch of intensity set up by conviction of its necessity, create and organise new tissue to do it with. . . . If the weight lifter, under the trivial stimulus of an athletic competition, can 'put up a muscle,' it seems reasonable to believe that an equally earnest and convinced philosopher could 'put up a brain.' Both are directions of vitality to a certain end. Evolution shows us this direction of vitality doing all sorts of things." Now, the need for new tissue to carry out the will and to further the development of the vital impulse leads to the

[1] See pp. 193–195.

development of new organs in existing species and ultimately to the development of new species.

Shaw is here taking over from Butler and the neo-Lamarckians the view that life's need for something sooner or later produces that for which the need is felt. How, to revert to the classical example, does the giraffe get his long neck? "By wanting to get at the tender leaves high up on the tree, and trying until he succeeded in wishing the necessary length of neck into existence." In this quotation Shaw summarises what he takes to be the doctrine of Lamarck. He proceeds to add in his own right: "You want, consequently, additional organs, or additional uses of your existing organs; that is, additional habits. You get them because you want them badly enough to keep trying for them until they come. Nobody knows how; nobody knows why; all we know is that the thing actually takes place. We relapse miserably from effort to effort until the old organ is modified or the new one created, when suddenly the impossible becomes possible and the habit is formed." The new habit and the new organ to be the vehicle of the new habit are evolved because in the long run we need them or—for Shaw uses both modes of expression—because life needs them in us. "If you have no eyes and want to see and keep on trying to see you will finally get eyes."

This, the method of evolution at the pre-conscious level, is still its method at the conscious, is still, in other words, the method of evolving humanity. Man feels a need and gradually wills into existence the faculty or organ which will enable him to satisfy it. The formula for this process is described in the first play of *Back to Methuselah* as, first, desire, then imagination, then will, then creation. Here is a summary statement of it from the wonderful dialogue between Eve and the Serpent at the beginning of the first play:[1]

[1] I heard Shaw read this aloud—he had written it during the day—on two successive evenings at a Fabian Summer School (see Chapter II, pp. 35, 36). It was beyond comparison the most impressive, dramatic occasion at which I have been privileged to be present.

"THE SERPENT: . . . imagination is the beginning of creation. You imagine what you desire; you will what you imagine; and at last you create what you will.

"EVE: How can I create out of nothing?

"THE SERPENT: Everything must have been created out of nothing. Look at that thick roll of hard flesh on your strong arm! That was not always there: you could not climb a tree when I first saw you. But you willed and tried and willed and tried; and your will created out of nothing the roll on your arm until you had your desire, and could drag yourself up with one hand, and seat yourself on the bough that was above your head."

A point which Shaw stresses is the *abruptness* of the appearance of the acquisition, whether it takes the form of bodily organ or faculty of awareness, in which the new evolutionary advance consists. There is a definite jump from the old level of behaviour and thinking to the new one: "The process is not continuous, as it would be if mere practice had anything to do with it; for though you may improve at each bicycling lesson *during* the lesson, when you begin your next lesson you do not begin at the point at which you left off; you relapse apparently to the beginning. Finally, you succeed quite suddenly, and do not relapse again. More miraculous still, you at once exercise the new power unconsciously."

The process of life's development, as hitherto described, is exhibited mainly in the acquisition of new bodily habits and physical traits. But the same process continues at the level of thought. We develop new powers not only of the body but of the mind, powers of insight, vision and intelligence because we want them, or because life wants to develop them in us that we may more effectively implement its purpose, or bring to consciousness new purposes of which life is as yet unaware.

Later, however, it appears that life's entry in and concern with matter is a mere temporary phase of life's development. Matter is entered into, only that it may be transcended; it is a ladder which must be scaled in order that, having arrived at the top, life may pass on to something else. Thus, though the Ancients in the last play of *Back to Methuselah* have complete mastery over their bodies, and can create surplus arms and legs at will, though they also possess power over other bodies and can apparently kill with a glance, the exercise of these powers does not interest them. They are bored with the knowledge of matter, bored even with the manipulation of matter.

> "One day," says the She-Ancient, "when I was tired of learning to walk forward with some of my feet and backwards with the others and sideways with the rest all at once, I sat on a rock with my four chins resting on four of my palms and four of my elbows resting on four of my knees. And suddenly it came into my mind that this monstrous machinery of heads and limbs was no more me than my statues had been me and that it was only an automaton that I had enslaved."

The attention of the Ancients formerly focussed upon their bodies is now directed elsewhere, their interests lie in something else. In what else? Before I attempt to answer this question, there are three subsidiary developments of the main evolutionary theme about which something must be said.

*Digression: (1) On the Right Conduct of Life*

As I hinted at the beginning, Shaw is a philosopher in both the senses of the word which I there distinguished. In his capacity as a dispenser of wisdom, he has contrived to let fall a number of pregnant observations on the secular topics of human interest and concern

from Marriage to Moderation and from Greatness to Gambling.

Many of these are collected in *The Revolutionist's Hand-book* which is printed at the end of *Man and Superman*. All are more or less directly informed by the underlying philosophy—in the first sense of the word "philosophy"—of which they are the directly deduced corollaries. I have space here to mention only three topics which occupy so much of Shaw's attention that though, as I have hinted, his treatment of them follows directly from his general position and could, therefore, with sufficient insight presumably be deduced from it, what he has to say may deservedly rank as an integral part of the Shavian philosophy.

These three topics are, first, the right conduct of life, secondly, women and genius and, thirdly, art.

If we are instruments created by life for the furtherance of life's instinctive purpose, our *raison d'être* will be found in the fulfilment of life's intentions in regard to us and not in the pursuit of our own individual purposes. The furtherance of life's purpose will consist in the being used up to the last ounce of one's energy and capacity in work that seems to one to be worth while for its own sake, as Shaw's own talents and energies have been remorselessly used in the spreading of Socialism and the writing of plays. It is by the maximum expenditure of effort in the ardours and endurances of living and thinking that one will develop and improve one's initial endowment of faculty and accomplishment, thus returning them at death with interest—an interest which is to be measured by the degree of the realised improvement upon the initially given potentiality—to the general stream of life of which we are the individualised expressions, with the result that, when life expresses itself in the next generation of living organisms, it will do so at a slightly higher level than it did before, because of the enrichments of acquisition and accomplishment that we have brought to it.

Now happiness will be found in the furtherance of the purpose for which we were created. Not unnaturally, since life will do its best to ensure the donkey's activity by dangling the carrot of happiness before its nose. Effort and endeavour, then, are the means to the happy and successful life and we shall find the recipe for happiness in not having enough leisure to wonder whether we are miserable or not. It is in the same vein that Shaw bids us "get what you like or else you will grow to like what you get."

Shaw's philosophy enables him to provide a new basis for the moral philosopher's traditional criticism of the life of pleasure-seeking. This, for Shaw, is a perversion of function, since it entails a diversion of effort to the pursuit of the individual's *own* concerns and a preoccupation with the indulgence of his *own* gratifications, when he should be engaged about the business of life which created him. The life of the epicure, the hedonist and the egotist is, then, a kind of playing truant when we should be at our lessons and life pays us out for our apostasy by ensuring that, as the direct pursuers of pleasure, we shall miss the pleasure that we pursue. Hence, the aphorism: "Folly is the direct pursuit of Happiness and Beauty."

*Digression: (2) On Women and Genius*

I do not wish to suggest by this sub-heading that women are geniuses or even that women have genius. The intention is to present the genius whom Shaw assumes by implication to be essentially male in his relation—a relation which is usually one of opposition—to women. (Shaw does, incidentally, speak in connection with George Sand of the comedy afforded by the accident of the genius being "himself a woman.")

Femaleness, in the creative evolutionary philosophy, is represented as being more primitive, in the sense of being more fundamental, than maleness. In the allegory of Lilith at the beginning of *Back to Methuselah*, Shaw

suggests that the initial form of life was female; Lilith, according to the Serpent, produced Adam from within herself. In the beginning, Lilith "who came before Adam and Eve . . . was alone: there was no man with her." She "sunders herself in twain" to give birth and is left at the end of the fifth play wondering whether in order to supersede human beings, she must needs give birth again.

Already latent in the dialogue between Gloria and Valentine in *You Never Can Tell*, this conception is developed in the Hell scene in *Man and Superman*. Here Shaw conceives life as working through woman to create man, who is designed to carry life to higher levels. "Sexually, Woman is Nature's contrivance for perpetuating its highest achievement. Sexually, Man is Woman's contrivance for fulfilling Nature's behest in the most economical way. She knows by instinct that far back in the evolutional process she invented him, differentiated him, created him, in order to produce something better than the single-sexed process can produce."

So far, so good. But unfortunately (for woman) in giving man so small a part in the process of reproduction, she set free his energies for the development of his vital inheritance by making acquisitions of which she had no prevision; as, for example, by thinking thoughts that she could not follow, by whoring after a beauty that she could not understand, by desiring things disinterestedly and pursuing them in and for themselves. For "how rash and dangerous it was to invent a separate creature whose sole function was her own impregnation! For mark what has happened. First, man has multiplied on her hands until there are as many men as women; so that she has been unable to employ for her purposes more than a fraction of the immense energy she has left at his disposal by saving him the exhausting labour of gestation. This superfluous energy has gone to his brain and muscle. He has become too strong to be

controlled by her bodily, and too imaginative and mentally vigorous to be content with mere self-reproduction. He has created civilisation without consulting her, taking her domestic labour for granted as the foundation of it."

Man also invents "dreams, follies, ideals, heroisms" and, we may add, creeds and causes with which to distract and develop himself, thus further diverting his energy and attention from the performance of the purely biological purpose for which woman created him. But since woman is the vehicle of a more direct inheritance from life, since she is biologically primary and man biologically secondary, woman succeeds in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred in bringing him to heel by turning him from adventurer or visionary, first, into the worshipper of herself—hence romance—and, secondly, when the hook of family maintenance has been swallowed with the bait of sexual attraction, into a bread-winner for herself and children. And since getting a job means doing the work which the world is prepared to offer you and to pay you for doing, instead of the work which you want to do, the subsidence of the artist, the idealist, the revolutionary or the scholar into the bread-winner involves a constant struggle between creativity and the thrill of beauty, curiosity and the pull of knowledge and, it may be, the vision of God on the one hand, and, on the other, the power of woman whose sole biological purpose is to keep the Life Force's pot boiling, (a purpose which expresses itself as a personal determination to hold the family together and at any sacrifice to promote its interests) and who stands therefore for security, conservatism, realism and common sense. Thus, we are told that for a man "marriage is a heavy chain to rivet on himself." Woman "is born with the chain attached to her and marriage is the only way open to her of riveting the other end of it on to a man." In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred she succeeds. Woman is endowed by the Life Force with the faculty,

or rather with the appearance of the faculty, of being able to share man's enthusiasms, respond to his ideals and echo his thoughts. But this apparent sympathy is only the bait on woman's hook. Once it is swallowed, the facile enthusiasms, the shared ideals, the "disinterested" interests, are discarded like a worn-out glove and the young man who would reform society, compose masterpieces, see visions, or talk with God, finds himself reduced by his triumphant mate to the *rôle* of a bread-winner for herself and her children.

*The Genius*

And so the case goes for ninety-nine men out of a hundred; but the hundredth case is the case of the genius. The genius is the repository of a unique "potential" of life, having been expressly created for the specific purpose of carrying life to higher levels by giving man a new insight into truth, a new concept of political association or moral obligation, a new vision of beauty, or a new refinement and subtlety of personal relationship. To put it biologically, the genius is a "sport" on the planes of the intellect and the spirit. Shaw's own definition is a man "selected by Nature to carry on the work of building up an intellectual consciousness of her own instinctive purpose." The genius is, accordingly, the vehicle of as direct and purposeful an inheritance from life as the woman herself and will sacrifice woman in pursuance of his purpose as ruthlessly as she sacrifices the ordinary man in pursuance of hers.

Since the mind of the genius is by definition in advance of the existing level of evolutionary consciousness, the work which he feels impelled to do is *ex hypothesi* work for which the world is not yet ready, and for which, therefore, it is not prepared to pay. If he is a "sport" in the sphere of art, he is allowed to starve in a garret in the usual way. If he is the possessor of a new and original insight in the spheres of morals or politics, if, for example, he is a Blake, a Tolstoy, a

Swedenborg, a Servetus, a Bunyan, or, Shaw would add, a Christ, he is usually persecuted with all the rigour of the law. In either event he is not a good husband, precisely because he is not "making good." What is more, he will be prepared without scruple to put his wife to the job of earning for him, herself and their family, the money which he is too preoccupied to earn himself:

> "He will risk the stake and the cross; starve, when necessary, in a garret all his life; study women and live on their work and care as Darwin studied worms and lived upon sheep; work his nerves into rags without payment; a sublime altruist in his disregard of himself, an atrocious egotist in his disregard of others. Here Woman meets a purpose as impersonal, as irresistible as her own; and the clash is sometimes tragic."

Hence the clash between a woman and a genius arises from the directness of the inheritance which each has from life; or, if the phrase be preferred, the strength of the respective "potentials" at which life is manifested in them. In the genius life's purpose is to lift itself to heights of consciousness not previously achieved; in the woman, to safeguard and maintain the level which has already been attained.

*Digression: (3) On Art and the Artist*

Shaw's view of art has already by implication been indicated. Art is a device by means of which life achieves its purpose of lifting itself to a higher level of conscious awareness and the great artist is the instrument which it creates for the fulfilment of that purpose.

The method of life's advance is envisaged in two stages. In the first, the creative artist,[1] the vehicle of a fresh, vital impulse makes his appearance. He proceeds

[1] The original thinker is from this point of view a special case of the creative artist.

to embody in works of paint or sound or in words the vision in which his original impulse expresses itself. Now, precisely because the impulse *is* original, the work of art in which it is embodied breaks the currently observed rules of composition, outrages the received concepts of form and style and taste, discards the hitherto accepted recipes for the catching and embodying of beauty and is, therefore, held to be a monstrosity of ugliness and disharmony. (Beethoven's Third Symphony, the music of Wagner and the paintings of the Impressionists are examples cited by Shaw.) In a word, it challenges prevalent notions, flouts current prejudices, shocks popular taste and, if it is didactic in tendency, outrages popular morality. Hence, the life of the genius is usually poor, solitary and brutish, and since he is a genius in respect only of the hundredth part of himself, the remaining ninety-nine hundredths being an ordinary man with a craving for human sympathy and affection and a natural desire to win the world's esteem and to bask in the sunshine of popular favour and his wife's approval, the genius is usually the most wretched of men. If, however, his vision does, indeed, embody a new and original impulsion from life, others will presently come to see things through the spectacles which he has tinted for them. The discordant symphony, the outrageous painting will be adopted as the accepted models of orthodoxy and good taste and the heterodoxies of to-day will be enshrined in the Prayer Books of to-morrow. This is the second stage, the stage at which the common consciousness of civilized mankind moves up to the level of insight from which the genius originally addressed it. Thus, the genius makes wide and straight for the many the narrow path which he has been the first to follow. He is beauty's midwife. He does not create beauty, but he brings to birth in sound or paint or stone the beauty in things which he has first discerned, so that ordinary men with their duller and grosser senses may presently apprehend for themselves the beauty

which the work of art throws, as it were, into high relief.

Such is the distinctive Shavian attitude to art and its function. Art is a device, one of the most important, for refining and enlarging the perceptiveness of men and women and so lifting life as a whole to a higher level of consciousness.

This is a high function and Shaw's attack on romantic art, by which he usually means art directed to the glorification of woman, is the expression of his indignation at its perversion. Art, as Shaw conceives it, is very largely a male preserve. It is, of course, natural that woman should seek to induce the artist to waste his talents in glorifying her, instead of going about his appointed task of raising the general level of man's awareness and deepening and refining his insight. But to do this is, in effect, to use the power of art to stabilise life at the level which it has already reached, instead of raising it to higher levels. It is as if the artist were to rest on the oars of his predecessors' achievements, instead of striking out for himself. Rightly regarded, art should supersede sex and not glorify it. In this sense *ne cherchez pas la femme*, Shaw tells us, is the clue to the motivation of great art.

But another attitude to art is discernible in Shaw's work in respect of which, and in respect of the manner of his advance to it, Shaw's thought curiously reproduces Plato's.

*Shaw and Plato*

Plato has a twofold attitude to art. Officially he suspects it because it rouses the sleeping dogs of emotion which were better left to lie, strengthens the irrational part of the soul and makes images of the things of the sensible world and so directs the soul's attention away from instead of towards reality. But there is another strain in Plato's thought, a strain that comes out more particularly in the *Phædrus* and the *Symposium*, which represents art as the medium in which the Form of

Beauty is manifested and, therefore, as a window, one of the clearest, through which man's soul may obtain a glimpse of reality.

Whilst Plato tends to move away from the first position to the second, the development of Shaw's thought seems rather to have been from the second to the first. In the last play of *Back to Methuselah* we find a comparatively lowly place assigned to art. With love, it is regarded as the staple occupation of the very young, the Festival of the Artists staged at the beginning of the last play of the pentateuch, being, apparently, supported entirely by the "under fives." "Soon," says the Ancients, "you will give up all these toys and games and sweets."

The He-Ancient belittles art, very much as Plato might have done when advocating the expulsion of artists from the ideal State. "As you grow up," he says, "you make images and paint pictures. Those of you who cannot do that make stories about imaginary dolls." But who, he presently asks, would make statues and images, if he could apprehend the originals? Who would want stories if he knew the facts? This thought is developed by the She-Ancient: "Art is the magic mirror you make to reflect your invisible dreams in visible pictures. You use a glass mirror to see your face; you use works of art to see your soul. But we who are older use neither glass mirrors nor works of art. We have a direct sense of life. When you gain that you will put aside your mirrors and statues, your toys and your dolls." Shaw does not here go to Plato's length and treat art as a will o' the wisp leading men away from reality. It is rather, for him, a substitute for reality, a substitute accepted perforce by those in whom life has not yet sufficiently developed to be able to achieve and sustain a direct view of reality itself.

Adapting Shaw's view of art as an image of reality, I venture to suggest that the artist may be regarded as one who has enjoyed the vision of the original but been unable to sustain it. So long as the vision lasts, it wholly

absorbs and completely satisfies; but it does not last. Presently it fades, leaving behind a memory of a beauty which is ineffable and an unappeasable regret. And so, while the memory is still with him, the artist sets out to make a visible image of what he has seen, to serve as a memento of the original, so that looking at it he can remind himself of the vision which he once had but has no longer. If this were true, the work of art would be an expression not of the inspiration which the artist has, but of the inspiration that he had once but has failed to retain. Shaw never makes this suggestion, although it seems a logical corollary of his view of art.

*Return from Digression: The Purpose of Life*

What, then, is the reality of which the artist makes copies, but which the Ancients directly apprehend? Shaw never seems to have made up his mind. His philosophy envisages life's evolution as the development of an ever more intense and penetrating power of awareness. Now, awareness must be directed upon something, this something being other than itself, and Shaw's thought seems to me to demand the inclusion in the universe of an element of static and immutable perfection upon which the consciousness of a fully developed Life Force might come to rest. Such an element is, indeed, postulated by other philosophical systems with which Shaw's has affinity. Thus, Platonic philosophers attain to a vision of the timeless Forms which, thereafter, they contemplate. Aristotle's God is engaged, at least in part, in mathematics, engaged, that is to say, in contemplating the static perfection of mathematical quantities and their relations. The reason for this demand for an element of changelessness and perfection in the universe is obvious. Thought by its very nature demands an object; there must be something for thought to think about. This something must be other than the thought itself and, since the factor of change in the universe has been appropriated for the

developing consciousness of the thinker in whom the ever-changing Life Force is expressed, the object, the thing thought about must, one would have supposed, be represented as exempt from the changes by which the evolutionary process is itself pervaded.

Shaw comes within striking distance of this conclusion without ever explicitly adopting it. It will be noted that in the quotation cited above, the She-Ancient speaks of a "direct sense" not of reality, but "of life," which suggests that life's activity of consciousness will in its latest and fullest development be directed upon itself. The speech of Lilith with which the play concludes, while contriving to give a fairly full exposition of Shaw's general view is, on this particular point, singularly uninformative.

What, we want to know, do the Ancients *do* with their developed consciousness? What does their thought busy itself about? What is it that it is the ultimate purpose of life to know?

Such answer as Shaw gives is contained in the two following passages from Lilith's last speech:

> "After passing a million goals they press on to the goal of redemption from the flesh, to the vortex freed from matter, to the whirlpool in pure intelligence that, when the world began, was a whirlpool in pure force. And though all that they have done seems but the first hour of the infinite work of creation, yet I will not supersede them until they have forded this last stream that lies between flesh and spirit, and disentangled their life from the matter that has always mocked it.
>
> "I brought Life into the whirlpool of force, and compelled my enemy, Matter, to obey a living soul. But in enslaving Life's enemy I made him Life's master; for that is the end of all slavery; and now I shall see the slave set free and the enemy reconciled, the whirlpool become all life and no matter."

These passages embody the following propositions:

(1) That life was originally a whirlpool in pure force;

(2) that it entered into matter, used matter and compelled matter to obey it;

(3) that by so doing it became matter's slave;

(4) that the object of life's development is to put an end to this slavery by winning free from or conquering matter. It is not clear whether matter still persists, life having, as it were, merely disentangled itself from it and cast it aside, or whether matter is ultimately eliminated by life, so that it ceases to be;

(5) that redemption from the flesh having been achieved, life will become pure thought.

But if, insisting once again that thought must surely be *of* something and that this something must be other than the thinking about it, we repeat the question, what, then, does life in its final expression *think about*, there is no answer. The system, in fact, in its ultimate consummation seems to deny the truth upon which Shaw has so often insisted in the course of its development. We are frequently told by Shaw in his *rôle* of popular philosopher or sage that we must not think about and concern ourselves with ourselves, but must lose ourselves in what is external to and greater than the self. But if we are Ancients, these admonitions no longer apply, for in the case of the Ancients thought, so far as one can see, is directed only upon itself. To postulate that it should be directed upon anything else would be tantamount to introducing into the Shavian universe a timeless static element, whether conceived as God, as Forms, as the Absolute, or even, as mathematical relations, which Shaw's thought, dominated by the conviction that the evolutionary process is all that there is, can never quite bring itself explicitly to admit.

I propose to conclude by indicating first, the respects in which the Shavian philosophy carries the doctrine of Creative Evolution beyond the point at which it was left by his predecessor, Butler, and, secondly, some of its more obvious weaknesses.

### *Likenesses and Differences between the Shavian and Butlerian Philosophies*

A conscious, creative, immaterial force expressing itself in matter and using and moulding matter in the pursuit of its own purposes is the premise which is taken as the starting-point of both Shaw's and Butler's philosophies. They share a common outlook on many subsidiary matters; for example, each writer is a warm advocate of *practical* intelligence; each sings the praises of common sense. Shaw, like Butler, hates professionals, especially doctors, and tends to look at people from a biological point of view, recognising in those organisms which are best adapted to the purposes of living the most valuable products of evolution. Moreover, for Shaw as for Butler, such persons are those who, while possessing no culture and few intellectual attainments, nevertheless exhibit a store of instinctive rule-of-thumb philosophy. 'Enry Straker and Alfred Doolittle are the lineal descendants of Mrs. Jupp in *The Way of All Flesh* and Yram in *Erewhon*. All these very pleasant and amusing people know what to do on all ordinary and extraordinary occasions, but none of them could tell you how they know it or why they ought to do it. Like some fortunate bridge players, they play the right card instinctively, while others after much thought and travail as often as not produce the wrong one.

So far the outlook of the two thinkers is the same; but when we push our inquiries a stage further, a marked difference reveals itself. Butler regards the operations of the speculative intellect as a pedantic futility, and appears to look forward with equanimity to the merging

of the practical intellect in unconscious instinct. There is nothing in his writings to show that he does not think that man would be better off without the intellect altogether and that its gradual supersession may be expected as the next stage in human progress towards the goal of evolution. For Shaw, on the one hand, the operations of the intellect *are* the goal of evolution. While, for both, the Force that animates the universe is a single, unified, unconscious urge, it is, in Shaw, an unconscious urge struggling towards consciousness. He admires the instinctively successful and practical man, but only because it is in such as he that life, by achieving a momentary equilibrium in the present, prepares itself for new achievements in the future. Shaw glories in life; he glories in it to the extent of maintaining that if we are to live properly we must live longer; but he only wants us to live longer, in order that we may think better. Thus the Ancients in the last play of the *Back to Methuselah* pentateuch, having achieved a relative emancipation from the needs and exigencies of material existence, employ their freedom in the unfettered activity of the intellect. Now, the unfettered activity of the intellect is engaged in contemplative thought. It is, then, in contemplation, the occupation of mystics in all ages, that Shaw appears to find the final object of evolution; it is for this that the experiment of life is undertaken; this is the bourne of life's pilgrimage. Butler prepared the way for this conception, but he did not share it. He described the method of evolution and gave it meaning, but as to its ultimate purpose he is silent. The system with which Shaw presents us in *Back to Methuselah* is thus a definite advance on Butler's work. It embodies a constructive essay in philosophy, which was probably beyond the reach of Butler's more negative mind; though it may be doubted whether, if Butler had not lived, such an essay could have been attempted. In this, as in so much else, Butler was Socrates to Shaw's Plato.

*Reception of Shaw's Philosophy*

It cannot be said that Shaw's philosophy has won wide acceptance. For this, his eminence in other fields is, no doubt, in part responsible. The English, as I have already remarked, find it hard to forgive a man for making more than one reputation and Shaw has made at least half a dozen. It is easy, then, to play down his claims as a philosopher on the ground that the man who was a great prose-writer, playwright, orator, wit, political thinker and public figure could not also be endowed with the profundity of the original philosopher, apart altogether from the time, energy and industry which the pursuit of philosophy demands. This criticism, the fruit of sour grapes is, I think, negligible. Shaw's eminence in each of the various departments I have mentioned enhances and does not detract from his eminence in the others; for his thought, as I have tried to show, is remarkably coherent and the doctrine of Creative Evolution informs and unifies his teaching on every other topic. Another reason for the comparative neglect of the more philosophical aspect of Shaw's work is the contemporary appearance of two divergent developments of the creative evolutionary view, that of Bergson in *Creative Evolution* and that of S. Alexander in *Space, Time and Deity*, which, though they spring from a metaphysical background not dissimilar from that of Shaw, issue in very different conclusions. As they were presented to the world in the more orthodox trappings of formal philosophical writing, they tended to occupy the spotlight of philosophical scrutiny and criticism to the exclusion of Shaw. As one who has endeavoured, not very successfully, to provide a formal philosophical setting for Shaw's doctrines,[1] I can vouch from personal experience for the comparative absence of serious attention which they have evoked. So much having been said by way of explanation and extenuation, it must be pointed out that there are manifest points of

[1] *In Matter, Life and Value* (O.U.P.).

weakness upon which serious criticism, if it had, in fact, been accorded, could have fastened.

Of these the most important are:

(1) *The Difficulty of Origins*

Whence, one wants to know, does the Life Force arise? How, to put it crudely, did it first contrive to appear upon the cosmic scene? There is no hint of an answer. We are presented with the Life Force as a going concern; it is there, as it were, from the beginning, personified in the myth of Lilith, "who brought life into the whirlpool of force and compelled my enemy, Matter, to obey a living soul." Now, Lilith, I take it, is the Life Force personified, is, therefore, the principle of original purpose and direction in the universe. Lilith, in fact, is the Logos. Whence, then, to adapt the question, does Lilith arise?

Now it may be said that the question is unfair. The problem of the first cause besets all the philosophies and none can pretend to have solved it. It is not merely that none of us know how the universe began; more to the point is the fact that we cannot conceive how it could have begun. The origin of things is and must remain a mystery.

All this is true, but Shaw's account, instead of diminishing, puts a premium on the mystery, and this it does in two ways. (*a*) If you start with an eternal omnipotent Being, creating the universe in pursuance of His own design, He Himself remains outside the universe which He creates, though for certain purposes and on certain occasions He may become immanent in it. Therefore, He is not affected by the universe's fate and remains immune from its destruction. Shaw's Life Force, even if it does not exhaust the universe—and by "the universe" I mean this scheme of physical things in space and time and life that visibly evolves within it—is integrally bound up with it. Therefore, (i) the Life Force can only be said to create the universe in the

sense in which it also creates itself. But can anything create itself? Can anything, that is to say, come out of nothing? Personally, I find the concept unthinkable. (ii) An omnipotent Creator can be credited with mind and purpose; Shaw's Life Force develops mind and purpose as it evolves. Therefore, it was initially without mind and purpose; therefore, it cannot be credited with the mind and the purpose to create itself and or the evolving universe. (iii) Being wholly immanent in the universe, it must share the universe's fate. Now the fate of the physical universe, according to the indications of present evidence, is ultimately to run down like a clock. It is difficult to see how the Life Force can avoid a similar end, unless it can contrive to emancipate itself from the universe in which it evolves.[1] (*b*) Instead of having one "inexplicable" on his hands, Shaw has two. For the Life Force is not matter; on the contrary, matter is, as it were, there to begin with, Lilith's enemy, whom she seeks to enslave. What, then, is the origin of matter? We are not told. Indeed, we can only suppose that matter has existed from eternity. But while an eternal non-created mind is difficult enough to imagine, an eternal non-created matter seems to me inconceivable.

*The Difficulty of End or Goal*

(2) Secondly, there is the neglect, to which attention has already been drawn, to make provision for any end or goal upon which the developed consciousness of the evolving Life Force could be directed. Shaw presents us with a dualistic universe which contains life and matter in which life incarnates itself and through which life develops. But if we ask, to what end does it develop, there is no answer. There is, that is to say, no element of perfect or changeless reality in Shaw's scheme, the apprehension and realisation of which might be regarded as constituting the purpose and goal of the evolutionary

[1] This criticism is further developed in Chapter VIII. See pp. 233, 234.

process. Shaw's cosmic scheme would seem to demand the inclusion of precisely such an element, an element of absolute value. Shaw might have said that life evolved in matter, through matter and beyond matter to a knowledge of value. He hints as much, but never explicitly says it.

*The Difficulty of the Relation between Life and Matter*

(3) No satisfactory account is given of the relation between life and matter. Life enters into matter, uses and moulds it. But how? We are not told. The traditional problem of the relation of life to matter, of the spaceless to the spatial, of the animating spirit to the animated medium is not so much solved as begged. Sometimes Shaw speaks of matter as attracting life: "What was wrong," says Pygmalion in the last play of *Back to Methuselah* "with the synthetic protoplasm was that it could not fix and conduct the Life Force. It was like a wooden magnet or a lightning conductor made of silk; it would not take the current." The metaphor here is that of an electric current running down a wire; different kinds of wire can, presumably, take different potentials of current. Normally, Shaw contents himself with such statements as that life or evolution "must meanwhile struggle with matter and circumstance by the method of trial and error," in order to rise above "matter and circumstance." It may, of course, be the case that the relation is ineffable and can only be prefigured in the language of metaphor and myth; but to many this fact, if fact it be, would seem so intractable and the relation which the metaphor conceals so unthinkable, that they would insist on demanding the abandonment of the dualistic scheme which requires it and substituting a monistic explanation either like the materialist in terms of matter alone, or like the idealist in terms of life or mind alone. The reflection that the unexplained relationship between life and matter entails and includes the vexed question of the relationship within the living

organism between mind and body, only serves to throw into high relief the enormity of the assumption that Shaw leaves, as it were, ungrounded. The two loose ends, mind and body, are never tied together, but are left dangling.

*The Difficulty of Free Will*

(4) It is never clear to what extent, for Shaw, the individual is free. Is he merely a vehicle for the canalisation and subsequent development of the Life Force, or can he win some measure of freedom from life's promptings? In the first event, he is a mere fountain-pen for conveying the stream of life, no more responsible for what he does than is the pen for what it writes. It is fairly clear that Shaw does not mean this. For if the individual were not in some sense free, the admonitions and exhortations and injunctions of which Shaw's practical philosophy consists would be beside the point. To be told, for example, that success in life consists in being used in pursuit of its purposes by the power that made you, clearly implies that it is open to you to resist being used in this way, open to you to follow your own purposes, open to you, in fact, to fail.

This, I have no doubt, is Shaw's view. We are, at best, imperfect instruments of life's purpose. In particular, we busy ourselves with our own concerns instead of using ourselves up in life's service, and although life does its best to point out to us through the instrumentality of Shaw and other wise men whom it sends into the world "to give conscious expression to its instinctive purpose," the way it would have us go, and encourages us to follow it by contriving that the life of direct pleasure-seeking will be unrewarding even in terms of pleasure, nevertheless, we do, in fact, all too frequently go astray.

Assuming, then, that we do have freedom, three difficulties arise. (*a*) First, is our freedom only a freedom to go wrong? Are we, when we go right, when, that is

to say, we go about life's business, mere automata, responding to the promptings and impulses that reach us from life, whereas when we assert our wills and go our own ways, when, in fact, we thwart life's purposes, we are acting as self-determining individuals? This is a depressing view to take of human free will. (*b*) If we are free, whence do we derive the energy which enables us to pursue a course divergent from life's purpose in regard to us? Granted that we are instruments of life, how can the instrument turn against the hand that wields it? Is it, conceivably, the interposition of matter between the main stream of life and its individual expressions that confers a measure of freedom upon the latter, much as a line of rocks lying athwart a river will diversify and deflect it into a number of different streamlets, each of which may pursue its own direction, though *the energy* with which it pursues is that of the parent river. This suggestion is not unplausible; but besides making use of a metaphor which may well be inadmissible, it derives the fact of freedom from the interposition of matter which limits the power of life over its individual expressions. Shaw himself never, so far as I know, tackles this difficulty. (*c*) It may and has been urged that Shaw's theory provides a pitiably inadequate explanation of evil and of the facts of moral experience.[1]

*Postscript*

I have fancied that towards the end of his life Shaw himself became dissatisfied with the philosophy of Creative Evolution sketched in this chapter. It is not merely that the philosophers were indifferent, that the public did not attend and that Creative Evolution remained a creed without a temple or a following. These things would not in themselves have discouraged Shaw; indeed, they would only have stimulated him to a more eloquent preaching, a more vigorous propaganda. But I have sometimes been tempted to wonder whether

[1] This criticism is developed in Chapter VIII. See pp. 235–239.

something more serious has not been amiss, a falling off of faith in Shaw himself.

The evidence for what is no more than a supposition, is of two kinds. First, negative; there is an almost complete silence in the later plays. *Good King Charles, On the Rocks, The Millionairess* and *St. Joan* have little or nothing to say about "the evolutionary appetite." Unlike the plays of Shaw's early period which destroy idols and preach Socialism, unlike those of his prime which convey a positive doctrine based upon a metaphysical foundation, these later plays are compatible with any doctrine, precisely because they preach no doctrine. There is a constant play of ideas and a scattering of *obiter dicta* about life and how it should be lived and men's communities and how they should be run; but the ideas spring from no general philosophy and the *obiter dicta* present no coherent body of doctrine. Reading them, one would not conclude that any philosophical position informed them.

Now, it is hard to believe that a man to whom the doctrine of Creative Evolution seemed as important as it did to Shaw in the early 'twenties when he wrote *Back to Methuselah*, would have dropped it so completely from the later plays, if it had still been embraced with the old conviction, especially when we bear in mind that the general tendency of old men, as the Dialogues of Plato, the later works of Goethe and the plays of Shakespeare testify, is to become not less philosophic but more.

The positive evidence is the speech of Aubrey, the Preacher, at the end of *Too True to be Good*, a play written in the early 'thirties in the mood of plain discouragement which the preface reflects. This speech strikes, to my mind, a more authentic note than any other utterance in Shaw's plays. I have never heard it without experiencing the illusion that it is Shaw himself who is speaking. It is a speech of frustration and disillusion. One after another the characters have found themselves forced to abandon the principles by which

and the purposes for which they have hitherto lived. The Sergeant has abandoned the literal inspiration and verbal inerrancy of the Bible; the Elder, the iron law of determinism by which his universe has hitherto been sustained; Mrs. Mopply, the pretences and conventions which have supported her life as an English lady; Mops, the ordinary reticences of speech with which young women have hitherto had the grace to conceal their wilder vagaries of conduct. "Miss Mopply," the outraged Aubrey is driven to protest, "there are certain disgusting truths that no lady would throw in the teeth of her fellow creatures." Aubrey himself has jettisoned all the moral principles and restraints to which the atheists of his father's generation clung so persistently, when they had jettisoned that belief in a divinely appointed order in the universe which alone justified them.

Each character is thus invoked to express after his own fashion a general condition of disillusionment in respect of the past and guidelessness in respect of the present. Men have hitherto dressed their souls in coverings of idealistic beliefs. Now their souls are naked, or go in rags. How, Aubrey asks, in the great speech with which the play concludes, "are we to bear this dreadful new nakedness; the nakedness of the souls who until now have always disguised themselves from one another in beautiful, impossible idealisms, to enable them to bear one another's company?" He goes on to speak of himself: "I stand midway between youth and age, like a man who has missed his train: too late for the last and too early for the next. . . . I am by nature and destiny a preacher. I am the new Ecclesiastes. But I have no Bible, no creed; the war has shot both out of my hands."

Is it fanciful to detect a personal note in these passages? Shaw also in the 'thirties must have seen himself as a man living in an age of transition. His philosophy had been originally embraced and developed as a reaction from the Christianity no less than the Materialism of the nineteenth century, a Materialism which Darwin's

theory of natural selection had done so much to establish. He had lived on into an age which, interested neither in Christianity nor in Darwinism, was indifferent to the philosophy with which he had sought to supersede them. Creative Evolution has never won acceptance among the younger generation who either did not read Shaw's philosophy or, if they did, did not take it seriously. In the pre-1914 era Shaw had a creed, Socialism, wherewith to fire the imaginations of the young; in the 'twenties he offered them Creative Evolution. But these once exciting beliefs have had no successors and since the 'thirties he has had nothing to offer.

As to his later beliefs, we can only speculate. Yet when in *Too True to be Good* we come to the last tragic utterance of the Preacher: "I am ignorant: I have lost my nerve and am intimidated: all I know is that I must find the way of life, for myself and all of us, or we shall surely perish. And meanwhile my gift has possession of me: I must preach and preach and preach, no matter how late the hour and how short the day, no matter whether I have nothing to say . . ."

Does that, too, one wonders, apply? I find it hard to believe that it does not; for has Shaw had anything original to say since the early 'thirties? Has he had either a message to give or a philosophy to develop? The answer, I think, must be in the negative. There have been only the authoritarian politics at which I glanced in the last chapter, and the episodic plays of ideas lacking both the framework of a plot and the cement of a doctrine to hold them together.

## CHAPTER VIII

# DIFFERENCES AND DEVIATIONS

OSTENSIBLY, THE THEME of this book is the impact of Shaw upon my generation and on a particularly receptive mind—in fact, my own—of that

generation. I have not had so many heroes in my life that I could forgo the chance of making the most of one of the few that the gods have vouchsafed to me. But the time came when the disciple ceased to follow in *all* the steps of his master; when he came, in fact, as the previous chapters have hinted, to reject most of Shaw's philosophy and to turn in distaste from his politics. It is interesting in retrospect to consider how these deviations, which I now see to have sprung from a fundamental difference of temperament, arose, and in what ways they first expressed themselves. I shall be in a better position to throw them into relief, if I say something, first, of the more obvious superficial likenesses.

As this book is about Shaw and not, except derivatively, about its author, I shall describe them in terms of Shavian characteristics.

## *Shaw as a Biological "Sport"*

First, then, Shaw would seem to have been a changeling, a somebody or something whom the fairies—only he recognises no such creatures—left on the doorstep of 3 Upper Synge Street, Dublin, on July 26th, 1856. Shaw, in fact, to put the point scientifically, was a biological "sport."[1] In consequence, Shaw makes his appearance in and impact upon the world as a man who owes nothing to ancestors or family. We know that his mother sang and his father drank, and that he was brought up in an atmosphere of grand opera and shiftless Bohemianism. We know, too, that he incorporated the singing and the opera into his being and reacted violently from the drinking and the Bohemianism, becoming an austere personal Puritan, who shamelessly indulged his senses in music and apparently in nothing else. For all that, his ancestors and his family would seem to have mattered less in his life than they do in the lives of most of us. It is a life which is notably destitute of birthdays, Father Christmases, carousals and

[1] See pp. 188, 189, for the Shavian significance of this term.

merry-makings; of aunts and uncles and cousins; it is also a life without roots in the earth, without traditions or ancestral creed. In a very literal sense Shaw brought nothing into the world with him.

Shaw also, I may add, knows little of Nature and nothing of the supernatural. To these characteristics I shall return later in the chapter. Before I come to them, I want to consider what bearing this lack of roots, this freedom from family, this, if I may coin the word, biological "sportishness," had upon his work.

First, then, in spite of his historical plays, he has little feeling for history and dislikes the past. When he presents the past in his plays, he presents it dressed up in the guise of the present. Consider, for example, the conversation ot the characters in *Good King Charles's Golden Days*. It is unashamedly contemporary. His celebrated attack on Shakespeare seems to have been inspired by an urge to tilt at tradition because it was traditional. Shakespeare, the poet, he acclaimed; Shakespeare, the playwright, he admired. What he set out to "debunk" was the lay figure embalmed by the conventional idolatry of three centuries. Secondly, he has no feeling for the common man, and for the foolish joys and pleasures of common men. In so far as he recognises their existence, he derides them or turns from them in distaste. Conventions he despises. Shaw, then, is a man apart; he is a spiritual aristocrat.

Without laying claim to any of these qualities, I cannot refrain from putting on record the frequency with which people have said to me: "I cannot imagine you having had a father or a mother; in fact, I cannot imagine you with a family at all."

*His Fastidiousness*

In witness of his apartness, I would cite his impatience with conviviality. I have noted on an earlier page that Shaw is fastidious. All the jolly coarseness and convivial littlenesses of ordinary life leave him bored or indifferent.

He has no pub or music-hall side. He has never had a "quick one," not so much because he is a teetotaller as because he does not like to waste his time in foolish conversation. He cannot stand—or he couldn't if he ever heard them—the jests of "hearties" in bar parlours. If he ever went to a music-hall, he would have found the traditional jokes about mothers and winkles and kippers as tiresome as I find the sickly ooze of sentimental crooning which has so largely replaced them. Shaw, in fact, has wit, but no levity. He never permits his mind to take a holiday, and he would find it an intolerable strain to depress it to, and keep it at the low level which enjoyment of the nineteenth-century music-hall demanded and the twentieth-century revue demands more insistently.

Shaw, again, could not tolerate after-dinner speeches. There is a story, I hope authentic, of Shaw getting up at a public dinner into which he had been inveigled—it must have been in his comparatively early years: later he would have been too wary—to remark, "Gentlemen, gentlemen, I am sure we should all get along very nicely, if we do not try to enjoy ourselves quite so hard." I suppose if you have had nothing to drink, after-dinner jokes and anecdotes must be hard to bear.

In all these respects I am, or used to be, largely in agreement with Shaw, with one important exception—I have usually had plenty to drink, and then I have made and enjoyed after-dinner speeches with the best and the silliest.

*Shaw on Holiday*

Similarly with holidays. The ordinary holiday of the ordinary man with its lounging on beaches or sands, its throwing of sticks and stones for dogs, its mild drinking and swearing, its perambulating of the pier, its prowling on the prom' after the girls, strikes him as simply boring. One of his early articles contributed to *The World*

consists of an uproariously funny account of a visit to Broadstairs, which, though written in a style of high comedy, should have been sufficient, had anybody cared to take it seriously, to have ruined that estimable watering place for all time.

"Let no man henceforth ever trifle with Fate so far as actually to seek boredom. . . . Before I was ten minutes here, I was bored beyond description," the article began. "Mad for want of something to do . . . suicide, as I have related, seemed the only thing left. . . ." The article continues for some pages in this vein, concluding that, "The best definition of hell is a perpetual holiday."

It was, no doubt, Shaw's superabundant energy that made the life of the ordinary watering place seem to him the epitome of boredom.

"I am," he wrote in one of his articles for *The World*, "unfortunately so constituted that if I were actually in heaven itself, I should have to earn my enjoyment of it by turning out and doing a stroke of work of some sort, at any rate of at least a fortnight's hard labour for one celestial evening hour." This line of thought is summarised in the celebrated aphorism, "the secret of being miserable is to have leisure to bother about whether you are happy or not."

I, too, was cursed with a superabundant energy and agreed heartily. My childhood, so far at least as its holidays were concerned, had been spent in hotels. These I found stifling. I could never take it for granted that the inmates of these places should be quite so dead in life. I could never bring myself to believe that men and women with the whole world open to them for effort and adventure and amusement should take things quite so easily, should make such small demands on life, be content with so little—except that I knew in my heart that they were not content; you had only to look at their faces to see that they were not. I could neither understand this apathy of inertia nor forgive it;

for my part, I wanted to be up and doing something, something, anything, rather than nothing.

*Energy as the Enemy of Friendship*

This attitude to the humdrum conventional pleasures of ordinary, uninspired and unaspiring persons makes a man unpopular as an acquaintance and tiring as a friend, and I doubt whether Shaw ever had a friend. Colleagues and co-workers, yes; acquaintances by the hundred, but serious friends in the sense of intimates—I wonder. Indeed, I doubt whether Shaw was ever intimate with anybody. At one time he was continuously in company with the Webbs, and spent most of his holidays with them; but did they, one wonders, ever exchange confidences? Did they intellectually and spiritually unbutton? We shall never know. For my part I doubt it, if only because of the deterrent effects of the impact on other people of the celebrated Shavian energy. For, I repeat, it is difficult for a very energetic person to keep a friend, when he is at the top of his normal form, while in his unrepresentative moments of weakness and relaxation, he is apt to find that they have all been frightened away.

When I was a young man, vigorous, energetic and a habitual walker, I spent a week-end at Margate with a well-known figure in the Labour movement, a man considerably older than myself, with whom my contacts had hitherto been chiefly on the tennis court.

The occasion was distinguished by a curious financial arrangement, unknown to me previously and since, whereby the charge for staying for the weekend at a specified hotel was included in the cost of one's railway fare. We arrived on the Saturday in time for luncheon, took a bus to the hotel, lunched substantially and then shot direct from the luncheon table out of the hotel for a walk. We walked round the coast of the Isle of Thanet from Margate to Ramsgate, a distance of, I suppose, eight or nine—or was it ten?—miles. At Ramsgate I

asked for tea to which my companion assented rather as one making a concession to the flesh of a weaker brother. While I drank it, he prowled about Ramsgate, bidding me waste no more time than I could help. After I had swallowed my tea, we walked again round the coast of the Isle of Thanet, arriving at the hotel in time for dinner. My companion, an expert mathematician, was one of those who regards walking as a background to conversation—I was not yet experienced enough to have learned to avoid such men—and during most of the way back expounded Einstein's theory of relativity, which had just burst upon the world. A walk round the coast of the Isle of Thanet is not an exhilarating experience and what with the hardness of the shingle, the distress of the scenery and the pressure of the exposition, I found myself very tired when we got back to the hotel. After dinner we played "two hundred up" in the billiard room and then I went to bed.

We spent Sunday in similar fashion. At dinner on Sunday evening I was not only tired, but unwell, and went to bed about nine o'clock with a temperature, thus depriving my companion of his anticipated billiards. More in sorrow than in anger he reproached me for my weakness, the reproach taking an *et tu, Brute?* form. "I wonder," he said in effect, "if you realise what it means to be embarrassed by a fund of energy like mine. Never to get tired yourself, but to tire out everyone who comes into contact with you—it makes for a lonely life. After a time people, knowing that you will insist upon playing games with them, or taking them for walks, or informing them, knowing, in fact, that you will always insist upon doing something with or for them, even if it is only putting their affairs in order for them, begin to avoid you. One by one I have seen my friends fall away from me merely because I have tired them out and because they are frightened of being tired out again. I did think," he ended sorrowfully, "that *you* could stand the pace."

Having tired out a good many people in my time, though not so many and not so often as my companion of the week-end, I can now sympathise with him in his predicament. I can also understand why Shaw's persistent refusal to give either his mind or his body a holiday created a sort of vacuum around him and emphasised his apartness from ordinary men.

*Shaw's Inhumanity*

I suggest that this apartness, this failure to be commonly human, expressing itself in immunity from common or garden weaknesses, refusal to have a drink and inability to relax in carpet slippers with a pipe and a pint, has played a not inconsiderable part in the formation of those anti-democratic views which were described in Chapter Six. It is also, I think, responsible for a certain misunderstanding of common men. It is only natural that Shaw should make the mistake of thinking that common men drink and smoke only to make the otherwise unendurable business of living tolerable to themselves—for that could have been the only reason why he drank and smoked. It also made Shaw a somewhat embarrassing companion. It is hard to feel entirely at one's ease with a man whose mind remains keen and unclouded, while one's own is muzzy and muddled; hard to forgive a man for taking a wholly dispassionate and reasonable view of a situation, when one sees it oneself and is conscious of seeing it in colours made rosy by drink.

*The Beginning of Difference*

And here at last I come to the beginning of my differences from Shaw, all of which seem to me in the last resort to derive from the fact that we have different bodies. That the mind and the body are intimately connected I am well aware; so intimately, indeed, are they joined, that there are those who assert that, even if the body does not wholly determine the mind,

nevertheless there can be no event in the one which is not accompanied by a corresponding event in the other. When due weight is given to this hypothesis—and it must from the nature of the case remain only a hypothesis—it is, nevertheless, as it seems to me, possible to point to some aspects of or elements in our consciousness which are *prima facie* free from determination by the body, while other aspects and elements are largely influenced, if not wholly determined by it. The ability to do mental arithmetic or the activity of solving chess problems would seem to be purely mental; the appetites, as expressed in the preference for one kind of food over another, in sexual normality or sexual perversion, to spring very largely from the body. Thus, while I do not believe that my partiality for Philidor's defence as a chess opening for black is in any obvious sense a by-product of neural or glandular peculiarities, it *does* seem to me to be probable that my dislike for marzipan and beetroot are psychological reflections of bodily determinations. I am aware, of course, that they can be attributed to psychological conditioning. I am also aware that they are susceptible of explanation on psycho-analytical lines, but I am not writing a philosophical or psychological treatise, and I am not, therefore, under obligation to delve below what is *prima facie* in the case, nor, though I am prepared to make my bow to these possibilities, am I inclined, *prima facie*, to think them probable.

*Elements in Consciousness derived from the Mind and the Body Respectively*

I would, then, venture the general assertion that a person's taste in food and drink and the quantity of both that he likes, his sexual peculiarities and his tendencies to sadism or masochism, reflect the kind of body that he has rather than the kind of mind. In the same category I would place certain aspects of his instinctive and emotional life, more particularly those

which are bound up with the secretions of the ductless glands. At the other end of the scale I have already placed mathematics and chess; to them, there should, I think, be added philosophy and science. Thus, a man's way of looking at a geological specimen or at a problem in metaphysics, his interest in applied science or in civil or constructional engineering and the pleasure which he takes in engineering seem to be largely determined by his initial *mental* make-up; so, too, is the degree to which he is naturally inclined to scepticism or to faith in matters of religion. There is, of course, a considerable area of consciousness that cannot be clearly placed on either side of the line. Examples are the fear of heights, in regard to which it is uncertain whether it should be explained psychologically in terms of events which happened in early childhood, or physiologically in terms of a defect in the semi-circular canals, and what might be termed one's natural predisposition to like one kind of music rather than another, or to like none at all, to be, in fact, tone deaf. Many hold that man is a spirit and that the spirit is neither mind nor body. The analysis of spirit is controversial and cannot be pursued here, but, broadly speaking, the spirit should, I suggest, be regarded as belonging to, or as a function of the personality considered as a whole. Body as well as mind is, on this view, an ingredient of the whole personality. For this reason a man's æsthetic and religious consciousness, in so far as it is spiritual, may owe more than his mathematical faculty to the body, in the sense that though his ability to perform mathematical calculations would be largely independent of his body, his preference for Mozart over Debussy, his love of Bach, his comparative indifference to poetry, his pleasure in nature, his desire for God and the intimations he receives of His existence—it is, perhaps, inevitably my own characteristics that I am citing as examples—are complex functions of his personality as a whole in the engendering of which the body plays its part.

I cannot pursue this topic further. It is sufficient for my purpose, if I have said enough to entitle me to assume, at least for the purposes of discussion, that consciousness can be roughly divided into three categories. Consciousness falling within the first category is largely determined by the body; that which falls within the second is wholly of the mind, while the third category of consciousness is the product of, or belongs to, or characterises the personality as a whole in which both mind and body are ingredients. Hence, though dependent upon both mind and body, this third category, the spiritual consciousness, is more than their sum, just as a picture is more than the paints and canvas of which it is composed, or a sonata is more than the vibrations in the atmosphere into which its notes can be analysed, though neither picture nor sonata can exist without the physical foundation of paint and notes.

Before I go on, I want to guard against over-simplification. I am not speaking of the body, but of that area of consciousness which obviously originates in and is caused by the body; not of the mind, but of that area of consciousness which does not in any obvious sense originate in the body. I propose to refer to the first as B.C. (body consciousness) and to the second as M.C. (mind consciousness).

Now the particular conclusion which this laborious preamble is designed to support is that, whereas my M.C. was extraordinarily like Shaw's, my B.C. was from the first very unlike.

*Points of Agreement and Disagreement*

In purely intellectual matters, I tended, as a consequence, to see things very much in Shaw's colours—how should I not do so, since I saw them through spectacles which he had tinted for me? I was immediately convinced by his arguments, shared his opinions, endorsed his conclusions, echoed his indignations and disgusts and took his points with delighted readiness.

Thus, I agreed with him about Socialism, anti-vivisectionism, anti-idealism, anti-vaccinationism, anti-romanticism, and anti-imperialism, deriving, as I have explained, more intellectual stimulus from the exposition and advocacy of his views than from those of any other writer.

But so far as my B.C. was concerned, I was at variance with him from the beginning. For, indeed, my body was very different. My body was reasonably athletic, so I delighted in games, spent much time in playing them and could never understand why Shaw should pooh-pooh them. My body, again, was normally carnivorous; I delighted in the eating of meat and at quite an early stage felt a contemptuous pity for Shaw's vegetarianism. My body was normally sexed and I approached the whole question of the relation between the sexes very differently from Shaw, though I did not realise this at the time. I tried to regard and to treat women very much as Shaw does in his prefaces, and very much as his characters do in his plays, to treat them, that is to say, as beings fundamentally like myself, only to become ever increasingly aware of the profundity of their difference from myself—and into what ludicrous and ignominious situations did my failure to perceive the differences between my sexual make-up and that of Shaw lead me! More important was the fact that in my relations with and reactions to women my behaviour, in spite of all my efforts to Shavianise it, remained incorrigibly un-Shavian. I was less consistent, less rational and more childish than the male characters, the Valentines and Tanners and Dubedats and Higginses I so much admired, being so much less in control either of myself or of the situation than the typical, self-confident Shavian man I in other respects aspired to be.

Again, I was fond of sports, of going up mountains and running down them, of walking across country, of shooting, riding and presently of hunting, to all of which Shaw was indifferent, when he was not actually

contemptuous. The truth is that unlike Shaw, who strikes one as a man who is all of a piece, I was a man at war with myself, since, while my B.C. was traditional and ancestral, was, in fact, the B.C. of a peasant, my M.C. was volatile, radical, even revolutionary. The result of their enforced combination was that singularly English product, a man of Tory tastes and Radical opinions.

As one gets older, the effects of one's education tend to become fainter and the ancestral elements in one's make-up to become stronger. In other words, the effects of training relax and of heredity increase. The very aged man reverts wholly to childishness; that is to say, the effects of training and education vanish to zero and heredity comes completely into its own. Also, as a man gets older, his body becomes more obtrusive and scores a deeper mark upon his character. This is partly because the desires of the body, nourished by habitual satisfaction over a long period, have bitten more deeply into the consciousness, so that in respect of their appetites the consciousnesses of old men are largely determined by their past lives; partly because, unless one is exceptionally lucky, the body after years of wear and tear tends increasingly to go wrong, and the pains and ill-humours that are generated by its malfunctioning impose themselves ever more clamourously upon one's attention. To put this in terms of my formula, the sphere of B.C. grows with age while that of M.C. diminishes.

It was, then, only to be expected that age should diminish the area of my consciousness in respect of which I echoed, agreed with and applauded Shaw and should emphasise the elements of unlikeness.

The spirit, I have suggested, derives from, though it transcends, both B.C. and M.C. Hence if B.C. increases at the expense of M.C., the spirit will come to reflect more of the ancestral and less of the acquired elements of the organism. As the years passed, the deliverances of my æsthetic and religious consciousness exhibited an

increasing divergence from those of Shaw. Music remains a bond between us; there are, too, large areas of literature over which my tastes still march with his. But in respect of the love of nature and the belief in God, a belief which is reinforced by certain fumbling intimations of religious experience, I have largely abandoned the tastes and valuations which he originally formed for me.

It is, I suppose, difficult to entertain a taste and not to regard it with approval, since no man willingly pursues or enjoys a bad thing, knowing it to be bad. It is equally hard to disagree with a man's conclusions, and not to regard one's own views as constituting a closer approximation to truth than the conclusions with which one disagrees; hard to reject previously held standards of valuation, and not to regard those which have replaced them in the light of a development. It is inevitable, then, that I should appear to myself as more accurately conceiving what is true, possessing a more sensitive appreciation of what is beautiful, capable of a deeper insight into the nature of things than in the days of my more complete agreement with Shaw. If it were not so, I should not have diverged; I should still completely agree.

It follows that in illustrating the respects in which my own thought and tastes have gradually diverged from those of Shaw, I cannot help but represent the divergence as a development and my former views as springing from limitations which I have learnt to transcend.

(This does not, of course, preclude the avowal of limitations of mine that Shaw transcends. He is, it is obvious, more intelligent; his mind is both quicker and more original and his wit is keener; he possesses powers of imaginative insight to which I can make no pretension; he has a sense of character and a power of dramatic construction which I lack. Shaw has, in fact, all those qualities, cited in earlier chapters, which constitute him a great man. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, if you

consciously and deliberately drop opinions you formerly held, you *must* believe that your revised opinions correct errors in the former; if through the development of faculties hitherto latent, or through a fortunate accident of which you have had the wit to take advantage, there opens for you a world of agreeable and uplifting experience which was previously closed, you cannot but welcome the change and regard it in the light of an advance.)

Now, of the three major differences upon which I propose to touch, the first constitutes a clear case of increasingly divergent B.C., while the second and third are examples of a spiritual development strongly influenced, if not wholly deriving from, B.C. divergence.

(1) *Shaw's Simplicity in Externals*

In disdaining the life of the body, Shaw, with one exception, also disdained the pleasures of the senses. Throughout his life he has maintained an almost barbarous simplicity in regard to externals. For many years his dress was characterised by a defiant eccentricity which rendered all too plausible his account of his dressing, quoted by Hesketh Pearson: "Whilst I am dressing and undressing, I do all my reading. The book lies open on the table." Comfort, not convention, ease, not beauty, were what he aimed at. He had, it is obvious, little eye and no concern for visual beauty. He has small knowledge of and no independent taste in pictures. When all England was at his disposal, he chose for his retirement a comparatively ugly house whose Victorian outlines are shrouded with ivy and concealed by evergreens. What there is of elegance and refinement in its furnishing is due to Mrs. Shaw who found Shaw sick to the point of death—the story is told in detail by Hesketh Pearson—living in circumstances of austere squalor for which no degree of poverty could have provided an adequate justification, apart altogether from the fact that Shaw was by this time no longer

poor, carried him off, placed him in circumstances of decent comfort and married him. Shaw, it is intimated, was as indifferent to the squalor as he was to the decent comfort.

So far, at any rate as a young man, I was Shaw's willing imitator; I dressed badly, was comparatively indifferent to personal comfort, knew nothing of architecture and cared less and took an adolescent pleasure in outraging the conventions.

It was in matters relating to the palate that even from the first I diverged. Shaw, it appeared, scarcely minded what he ate or drank, so long as he did not eat meat or drink strong liquor. On the degree to which this peculiarity separated him from ordinary men and made him contemptuous of their common or garden conviviality and impatient of their earthiness and "mateyness," I have already commented.[1] But the question I should now venture to put to him, is why the sense of taste should be so arbitrarily discriminated against.

*Pleasures of Food and Drink*

The pleasures of food and drink are the most punctual, reliable and regularly recurrent of all those to which the human organism is susceptible. Day in and day out, four times a day, they offer themselves with compelling seduction for our enjoyment. They not only last through life; unlike the other pleasures of the senses, they grow with the years. The drinking of wine in particular is the peculiar and distinctive pleasure of the old.

Moreover, it is in respect of these pleasures that man most clearly demonstrates his superiority to the beasts. The pleasures of painting and music owe nothing to the bestial; they are man's alone. But the pleasures of food and drink spring from an appetite which man shares with the animals. Appetite is biological and its satisfaction is a condition of survival. Hence, it is among the most primitive elements of our being.

[1] See pp. 208, 209, 213, above.

Objectively considered, the mode of its satisfaction is grotesque. A small hole opens periodically at the bottom of the face into which solid substances are popped, through which liquid substances are poured. The subsequent history of these substances can be traced and described by physiologists; it is complex but not dignified. The end of the story is the incorporation of some part of them into the stuff of our bodies. What could be more undignified; what more grotesque? How, it may be asked, could a being who maintains himself by a method so ridiculous take himself seriously; how can he aspire to map the stars, split the atom, comprehend the universe and commune with God? Yet man alone among living creatures has had the wit to transcend his biological origins and to found upon the satisfaction of a need the cultivation of an art, the art of so cunningly mixing flavours and blending liquors that the pleasures of the palate may be elevated from the plane of the purely physical to that of the æsthetic, so that a burgundy and a *brie* may claim to be judged by the standards appropriate to works of art and not by the purely dietetic standards appropriate to health and survival. There are or used to be many other foods and drinks which leave the hedonist's sty to enter the palace of the Muses.

These things have been known to wise men in all places and ages, nor have they disdained to make the most of these small alleviations with which the gods in their mercy have seen fit to temper the rigours of our mortal lot. They have known that a little to drink makes everybody nicer, just as a well-chosen and well-cooked dinner softens human asperities and makes men tolerant and mellow.

And just as the most godlike activity of human beings is the making of music in quartets and concertos, so their most agreeably endearing occupations are those of eating and drinking. In respect of the former, man bears witness to the divine within him; in respect of the

latter he expresses all that is most attractively and distinctively human. (I say "human" and yet remind myself that the Greeks, though not the Christians, consistently included good eating and drinking among the pleasures of the gods.)

Now, who or what is Shaw that he should disdain these so easily accessible means of pleasure and refuse to cull this flower that man has grown upon the dunghill of his appetites? Why, I repeat, should he discriminate so arbitrarily against the pleasures of taste? Why, indeed, discriminate against the pleasures of all the senses but one, in order to throw into high relief his partiality for the sense of hearing? It is contrary to Shaw's godlike impartiality that he should fall victim to the small man's injustice, the injustice of having favourites.

*Some Consequences of Shaw's Attitude*

Three results follow:

(*a*) First, the sense of hearing comes, as we have seen,[1] to do duty for all the rest, and Shaw gluts in music the senses he has starved in life, taking music as a substitute for food and drink, for the pleasures of touch and the delight of the eye, for nature and love.

(*b*) Secondly, he is rendered aloof from the pleasures and contemptuous of the feelings of common or garden eating and drinking mortals; he does not relax himself and he knows little or nothing of men in their moments of relaxation.

(*c*) Thirdly, Shaw is betrayed by his limitations into supporting those very conventions which in other connections he has done most to deride. That food is unimportant, that obviously to enjoy it is not genteel, that it does not matter what you eat, that "I never cook for myself" is the theme song of nearly every English suburban or working-class woman who rationalises her lazy indifference to the art which has done most

[1] See Chapter III, pp. 54–60.

to gladden the heart as well as the stomach of mankind, by insinuating that preoccupation with the pleasures of the palate is something a little "gross"—"not quite nice," she says, as she takes out of tins and boxes meals already prepared instead of putting herself to the trouble of preparing them, warms up food that she has bought ready cooked, lest she demean herself by the act of cooking, and prudishly defends her fingers against contact with the tiny slivers of meat that she puts between the thick walls of bread that she miscalls sandwich, or extends her little finger as far as possible from the contaminating influence of the cup of tea, from which she so genteely drinks. In all this she believes herself to be emphasising her difference from and superiority to the animals.

It is to precisely this conventional "niceness," which in every other connection Shaw has scarified with his contemptuous wit, that his vaunted indifference to all but the simplest food has given a charter and an encouragement. I have heard the worst cook that ever took pride in her too clean kitchen quote Shaw in her justification, while the most improbable women declare themselves Shavian disciples on this one article of food.

*Shaw and the Body*

Shaw's fastidiousness in regard to food is, I think, only a special case of a general fastidiousness in respect of all things affecting the body. Shaw's dislike of the body is Manichean. He hates it and all its works and all its parts, and contrives to forget it whenever he can. He hates anecdotes that make fun of it. I was once present in his company when a friend told a broad story from the West Riding of Yorkshire. A train draws up at Cleckheaton or Heckmondwike or Shipley or some such West Riding place. In a compartment sit two maiden ladies. A nervous, bespectacled young man enters, puts his hat down in a corner seat, asks one of the ladies to keep it for him and leaves the compartment

again in order to buy a paper. A collier enters, removes the hat, tosses it on to the rack, and sits down in the young man's place. One of the maiden ladies ventures to remonstrate: "That seat," she says, "is engaged. Somebody put his hat down there to keep it."

"In t'West Riding, ma'am," the collier answers in broad Yorkshire, "it's bums as keeps seats, not 'ats."

It was, I thought, and think, a good story and we all laughed uproariously—all except Shaw, who was not amused. He would, one felt, have preferred that the bottom should not have been mentioned.

The psychologist may speculate as to whether his vegetarianism and his anti-romanticism may not derive from the same source. He dislikes steaks and chops because they are so palpably of the body, so physically lush and red blooded, just as he dislikes romance because its heroes and heroines are emotionally lush and full blooded, suffering, as it were, from an over supply of emotional red corpuscles.

In saying that Shaw's fastidiousness about food is only an aspect of a more general fastidiousness which expresses itself in a dislike of the earthy, the sensual, the primitive and the bodily, I am making a statement about that part of Shaw's consciousness which he derives from his body. I am saying that Shaw's B.C., to revert to my terminology, is tame and humble.

One cannot help thinking how much better, in his view, it would have been, if we had no bodies at all, or like the Ancients bodies so malleable and subservient that we could alter them at will.

### (2) *Indifference to Nature*

Shaw's neglect of the pleasures of the body is also, I suggest, at least in part a by-product of his rootlessness. It is because he is a man without traditions that he has no taste for traditional pleasures; because he had no childhood worth speaking of, because, therefore, he is not rooted in the ancient sagacities of infancy, that he

has never enjoyed the pleasures that adults share with children.

A similar explanation lies, I suggest, at the root of his comparative indifference to nature. The love of Nature springs from roots that are both bodily and ancestral, and, while it transcends its origins, is never free from their moulding. Consider, for example, the kind of pleasure that a child derives from contact with nature. It is a pleasure bound up with bodily activity. The child makes a bonfire on an October afternoon, goes birds' nesting in the spring, or mucks about with mud and water, digging channels and damming streams. The first is the germ from which springs the adult's feeling for autumn, its mists and smells, its parade of colours, its stillness and hazy distances; the second develops into a love of spring, its leaves and flowers, the song of its birds, the all-pervading sense of new and burgeoning life. From the third derives our joy in rivers and lakes and in the things that we do on them and in them; in canoe-ing and punting and rowing; in paddling and bathing. Now, I find it hard to believe that Shaw as a child ever made a bonfire, went birds' nesting or dabbled in muddy water. Hence, all that part of man's love of nature which springs from these ancestral and bodily things is lacking from his make-up.

Indeed, if we are to take his word for it, he actually dislikes nature. In a celebrated essay, entitled *A Sunday on the Surrey Hills*, one of the funniest in the language, he describes a week-end which he spent with the Salts in the Tilford district of West Surrey:

> "I have no illusions," it begins, "on the subject of the country. The uneven, ankle-twisting roads; the dusty hedges; the ditch with its dead dogs, rank weeds, and swarms of poisonous flies; the groups of children torturing something; the dull, toil-broken, prematurely old agricultural labourer; the savage

tramp; the manure heaps with their horrible odour; the chain of mile-stones from inn to inn, from cemetery to cemetery . . ."

In the course of the essay, Shaw reveals that, in his view, a country walk means "a walk and a talk"; that he takes care "not to look out of the train window between the stations"; that "Frensham Pond looks like a waterworks denuded of machinery"; that "as usual, in the country, it was raining heavily"; and that, having had a change of air and a holiday in the country he will "no doubt be able to throw off their effects in a fortnight or so." The whole account is so uproariously funny, that reading it one finds oneself laughing out loud. And yet it springs from the heart; it rings true, being no more than the explicit statement of an attitude which from one end of the plays to the other rigorously excludes nature and all mention of nature. In a Shaw play audience and actors alike are imprisoned within four walls; not a door or a window opens upon the world outside; not a tree appears to rest one's limbs, not a field or a hillside to attract one's meditative gaze; not a stream in which to bathe one's aching feet. It is all of the town, "towny"; or, more precisely, of the lecture-room, "talky." I know no other writer who ignores nature so completely or speaks of her so contemptuously. "Your landscapes, your mountains, are only the world's cast skins and decaying teeth on which we live like microbes." The words are those of a He-Ancient in the last play of *Back to Methuselah*, and yet—one cannot restrain the comment—what a horrible thing to say! Only a man for whom nature is either non-existent or, when its existence is recognised, frankly repellent, could have put such a thought into the head even of a He-Ancient. Mozart alone among great men succeeds in expelling nature so completely from his works. As I have grown older, I have come to care for nature more and, in respect of the nature-loving part of me, have

moved further from Shaw and from his values, his outlook and his influence.

(3) *Exclusion of the Supernatural*

It is not only nature but super-nature that Shaw excludes. I revert here to the criticism of the Shavian philosophy that I ventured to suggest at the close of the last chapter. What, I there asked, does the developed consciousness of the Ancients find to do? Upon what is it directed? If there is an order of the universe which is outside and exempt from the evolutionary process, to achieve a union with or at least a knowledge of that order might well be the purpose of the process. If, to use Plato's language, there is a world of being in addition to the flux of change and becoming, then an ever-more continuous approximation to being might well be conceived as the end or goal to which the world of becoming aspires, an end which pulls the evolutionary process forward, as it were, to achieve it.

Meanwhile, it is in the knowledge and contemplation of the manifestations in the familiar world of the eternal world of being, in the enjoyment of art and nature, in the endeavour after righteousness and in the disinterested activity of the enquiring intellect that on this, the traditional view of European philosophy, the employment of the mature and developed human consciousness may be most appropriately conceived.

For what, after all, does the wise man do? He seeks to understand and pursue those values whose recognition is the distinguishing mark of the human as opposed to the animal consciousness. What does the mystic do? He seeks not only to know but to achieve unity with the reality which transcends the familiar world and in so doing to lose the consciousness of his own individual identity.

But there is nothing of all this in Shaw. Indeed, there cannot be since, for him, there is no real world of being. The Shavian universe is all of a piece, a flux of change or becoming which contains no order of reality

to give purpose and direction to the evolutionary process and to constitute its goal. Shaw admittedly calls the movement an evolutionary *development*, but has he, in the absence of a goal, any right to use the word? For the notion of development, like that of progress, implies not only movement, but movement in a direction, and the notion of direction entails the notion of goal. If I place myself in the street between Charing Cross and Temple Bar and set my legs in motion, there is change, there is process; but unless I know whether I want to go to Charing Cross or to Temple Bar, it is impossible for me to say whether I am progressing or not.

Shaw, then, has no sense of the supernatural, a characteristic which Chesterton connects with his lack of family ties. It is because there is nothing of the ancestral in Shaw that, Chesterton suggests, he is a man without folk lore and fairy tales. It is, indeed, hard to believe that Shaw ever passed through a phase of what is called "faith" and, when he grew up, he grew up without the customary bumps of reverence and awe. There is no order of being in Shaw's universe that is permanently valuable; there is nothing, therefore, that is worthy of admiration, let alone worship; there is only the evolutionary force of life, working in and through its enemy, matter.

*Shaw's Conception of God*

Shaw, it is true, makes frequent use of the word "God," but God is, for him, only the Life Force at its highest level of expression or, to adopt a phrase from Professor Alexander's work, *Space, Time and Deity*, at the level of expression which has still to be realised and serves, therefore, as a goal or end for the level which has already been realised. Shaw's God, being in effect the Life Force, revolves and changes with the evolving and changing world, developing as the universe develops. "Never," he says somewhere, "believe in a God that you cannot improve upon."

Wherever in the Shavian writings reference is made to God, it takes this form. Consider, for example, the treatment of God in *St. Joan*, which many hold to be the greatest of Shaw's plays. The word "God" is frequently on Joan's lips; for example, "I believe that God is wiser than I; and it is His commands that I will do. All the things that you call my crimes have come to me by the command of God. I say that I have done them by order of God; it is impossible for me to say anything else." Indeed, she invokes the name of God with such regularity that she is rebuked by the Archbishop: "If I am not so glib with the name of God as you are," he says, "it is because I interpret His will with the authority of the Church and of my sacred office."

Shaw credits Joan with possessing a faculty which normally goes by the name of inspiration. When her critics suggest that this faculty is nothing more than imagination of which her "images" are the fruit, Joan accepts the suggestion. "Of course," she says; but adds, "that is how the messages of God come to us." She vigorously repudiates the idea that her voices mislead her. "Even," she concedes, "if they are only the echoes of my own common sense, are they not always right?" She insists that the voices come first and that, in so far as their dictates are such as reason approves, the reasons come afterwards. To adopt modern terminology, she uses her reason merely to rationalise inspirations which are themselves extra-rational. What, then, is this inspiration and whence does it come?

Shaw's answer, explicitly given in the preface, is briefly as follows:

(1) There are forces at work in the universe which create and use individuals for purposes transcending the ordinary utilitarian "purpose of keeping these individuals alive and prosperous and respectable and safe and happy in the middle station of life."

(2) These forces are dramatised by the individual of whom they make use.

(3) The form which the dramatisation takes will depend upon the spiritual and cultural environment into which the individual is born, appearing as God, the Father, the Virgin Mary or St. Catherine, according to circumstances.

(4) So to personify "that pressure of the driving force that is behind evolution which I have just called the evolutionary appetite" is a necessity on the part of the inspired individual whom Shaw calls "the hallucinated adult."

(5) It follows that "all the thinking of the hallucinated adult about the fountain of inspiration which is continually flowing in the universe, or about the promptings of virtue and the revulsions of shame: in short, about aspiration and conscience, both of which forces are matters of fact more obvious than electro-magnetism, is thinking in terms of the celestial vision."

The upshot is clear to anyone who is familiar with the general tenor of the Shavian philosophy. The extra-personal force which uses individuals, the "evolutionary appetite" which drives men forward, is the Life Force. The Life Force creates and employs individuals as the vehicles of its own expression, and communicates its promptings to them as a stream of impulses, inspirations and intuitions. These impulses, inspirations and intuitions mark off their recipients as persons apart, so that the ordinary run of mankind is led to say of them that they are "inspired." To the recipient himself the intimations from the Life Force appear as actual voices which the recipient hears, faces which he sees, persons, even, whom he talks to. What voices, what faces and what persons will depend upon the accidents of history and circumstance, affording a problem "for the psychologist, not for the historian." Nevertheless, they are all of them strictly speaking hallucinations. St. Catherine, God, the Virgin are not seen, because they are not there to be seen, are not heard because they do not exist to be heard as objective entities, personages who have

being in their own right, independently of our consciousness. They are merely creatures of our incorrigibly dramatic imagination which, stimulated by the promptings of the Life Force, projects them on to the canvas of an empty universe and then proceeds to hail as figures of reverence and awe the creations of its own projective faculty.

The figures and voices, then, are illusory; they have no objective reality. As Shaw himself avows, that "the voices and visions were illusory, and their wisdom all Joan's own, is shown by the occasions on which they failed her, notably during her trial." Here, then, is one more piece of evidence, if more were wanted, that Shaw's universe is, as I have put it, all of a piece. His world is not on two levels but on one, and his God, in so far as he permits himself to use the term at all—and that he does so is only a concession to popular modes of thought—is simply the principle of change and development in the universe. To put Him at his lowest, He is "the evolutionary appetite" which makes the wheels of the world go round.

### *Objections to Shaw's Concept of God*

This is not a book on metaphysics or theology and it would be out of place, therefore, to embark upon a formal criticism of this concept of deity. I venture, however, to make one point which had significance for my own development, since it was largely instrumental in engendering first dissatisfaction with and ultimately the abandonment of Shaw's vitalist philosophy. Let us assume for a moment that the arguments for the presence in the universe of some kind of creative activity are accepted, the need, affirmed by most religions, for something to reverence and worship is felt. (Shaw, I think, admits these arguments. Indeed, they form part of his frequently reiterated case against Materialism; he also admits the existence of the need or, rather, he tells us that we ought to feel it, even if we don't. More

particularly in his later writings, the Life Force is referred to with emotionally evocative epithets; it is super-personal and greater than ourselves; its purpose must be fulfilled; its drive must be assisted; it is that which gives us life and in its service our lives become worth living. Shaw speaks almost as if we had a *moral* obligation to assist the evolutionary process.)

Now, the point I venture to make is that a God conceived on the Shavian model does not fulfil the office that is required of Him; does not, in fact, fill the worshipper's bill. For, if the universe is all of a piece, and God Himself is a part of, or is an element in that universe, being in His character of Life Force the universal cause of the being of all living things—and it may well be the case, Shaw often suggests that it is, that all things are in some degree living—then God, who shares and is responsible for the development of the universe which He promotes, must also share its fate.

Now, if the natural order of things in the space-time continuum is all that there is, the fate of the universe is known. According to the second law of thermodynamics it is to run down like a clock and ultimately to reach a condition of equal energy distribution. Thereafter no events of any kind will occur. The universe, then, will ultimately become eventless; there will be no more life, no more development and no more God. God, in fact, so conceived is under sentence of death.

It is, of course, conceivable that, as Lilith suggests in the last play of *Back to Methuselah*, life may ultimately supersede the need to embody itself in matter and will, therefore, win free of matter and, presumably, of matter's fate. But Shaw's philosophy gives us no ground for supposing that such an eventuality will be realised. Life, as Shaw conceives and represents it, is always incarnated in material stuff; almost inevitably, since a disembodied, unexpressed activity of life with nothing to individuate it runs the risk of being dismissed as a mere abstraction. Now, a Life Force which runs down,

as it were, with the universe which it animates, or, to put it in theological terms, a God who, being part of the evolving universe, is under sentence of death, is not the kind of being for whom we can feel the sentiments of awe and reverence which Shaw claims for the Life Force. Even if He could be held to satisfy the arguments which have been adduced for God's existence, He certainly does *not* satisfy men's need to reverence, love and adore.

And here I come to one of those points of departure whence my thought first diverged from that of Shaw. A man's need to believe in God tends to grow greater as he grows older. To meet this need, the God-substitute which was all, as it seemed to me, that Shaw's philosophy had to offer, seemed increasingly inadequate. More particularly did it seem inadequate in respect of the account it gave of evil. Since it was the conviction of the reality of evil that chiefly occasioned my own change of view, I propose to consider Shaw's account in detail.

Before I explain the significance of Shaw's account of evil, I propose to recapitulate those divergences between Shaw's views and my own upon which I have already touched, relating them to our bodily differences.

*Summary of Body-Originating Differences*

Shaw was lean and angular, belonging to what Kretschmer calls the "asthenic" type and his bodily appetites were below average strength. I was fat and short, a "pyknic" in the Kretschmer terminology, and my bodily appetites were certainly not of less than average strength. Because I was a man given to eating and drinking, I enjoyed conviviality and all that springs from and goes with it. Conviviality was a closed book to Shaw, and the fact that it *was* closed led him, as I have ventured to suggest, to despise ordinary men and flirt with theories of supermen, to disparage democracy and cry up dictators. Owing to the presence in my being of ancestral elements which were lacking in Shaw, I was sensitive to nature and took an interest and pleasure

in natural processes which Shaw found either boring or frankly disgusting. Life on a farm is to me full of interest and variety; I doubt if Shaw has ever lived it. I suspect that if he tried it, it would bore him. Has he, indeed, not told us, in the essay to which I have already referred[1] that "from the village street into the railway station is a leap across five centuries; from the brutalising torpor of Nature's tyranny over Man into the order and alertness of man's organised domination over Nature."

It was, again, my body and the desires that sprang from it that made me fond of games and sports and led me to the enjoyment of purely physical pleasures. It also—and here what I have called B.C. passes over into and is transcended by spirit—gave me a vivid appreciation of natural beauty and the rudiments of a nature mysticism. There is no trace of nature mysticism in Shaw, nor, I feel, does his all-of-a-piece universe make adequate provision for it. Finally, my different body with its full and obstreperous appetites led me beyond nature to super-nature, led me, in fact, to an avowal of a God who was outside the nature process; and this it did by giving me an insight into the nature of evil.

*Shaw's Account of Evil*

Shaw has no belief in the original reality of evil. By "the original reality of evil" I mean that evil is something endemic and ineradicable in human nature, and, therefore, in the order of reality to which human nature belongs; I mean, in fact, original sin. Evil, for Shaw, is a by-product of circumstance—more particularly, of economic and social circumstance. This view is stated in one of the great passages of English prose in the preface to *Major Barbara* which propounds the view that evil is a by-product of poverty. Shaw's indictment of capitalist society is based on its acquiescence in the poverty of most of its members. "Let him," he represents the capitalist as saying, "be poor":

[1] See p. 226.

"Now what does this Let Him Be Poor mean? It means let him be weak. Let him be ignorant. Let him become a nucleus of disease. Let him be a standing exhibition and example of ugliness and dirt. Let him have rickety children. Let him be cheap and let him drag his fellows down to his price by selling himself to do their work. Let his habitations turn our cities into poisonous congeries of slums. Let his daughters infect our young men with the diseases of the streets and his sons revenge him by turning the nation's manhood into scrofula, cowardice, cruelty, hypocrisy, political imbecility, and all the other fruits of oppression and malnutrition. Let the undeserving become still less deserving; and let the deserving lay up for himself not treasures in heaven, but horrors in hell upon earth."

"The evil to be attacked," then, "is not sin, suffering, greed, priestcraft, kingcraft, demagogy, monopoly, ignorance, drink, war, pestilence, nor any other of the scapegoats which reformers sacrifice, but simply poverty." What, in short, is the matter with the poor is their poverty.

And the remedy? The remedy for evil is the remedy for the poverty that engenders it—namely, money.

"Money is the most important thing in the world. It represents health, strength, honour, generosity and beauty as conspicuously and undeniably as the want of it represents illness, weakness, disgrace, meanness and ugliness. Not the least of its virtues is that it destroys base people as certainly as it fortifies and dignifies noble people."

"The crying need of the nation," Shaw concludes, "is not for better morals, cheaper bread, temperance, liberty, culture, redemption of fallen sisters and erring brothers, nor the grace, love and fellowship of the Trinity, but simply for enough money."

I dare say Shaw would not accept this as a full account of his view, for there is nothing here about the distinctive vices of the rich, luxury and arrogance, ostentation and cruelty and pride, vices which in other connections he has censured with the eloquence of a Swift or a Bunyan. Nevertheless, the ethical implications of the doctrine explicitly stated in the preface to *Major Barbara* and drawn intermittently throughout the course of his work, are sufficiently clear. Evil is neither endemic nor ineradicable in man; it is the product of circumstances. Remove the circumstances, give everybody, for example, an equal and an adequate income irrespective of work done, and the evils due to poverty will disappear together with the evils of snobbery and patronage which are poverty's by-products. For the rich, too, may be expected to disappear when our social system has been so remodelled as no longer to put a premium upon wealth. In this matter, as in all others, we must look for progress to the development of our species under the impulsion of the force that drives evolution forward. It is to be noted that the "great man," as Shaw conceives him, Cæsar, for example, or St. Joan, is wholly without the characteristic vices of the rich; so, too, are the Long-Livers in the fourth play of *Back to Methuselah*.

*Untenability of the Shavian view of Evil*

In common with so many Socialists of my generation I, too, for long entertained this view of the nature of human evil. And because I entertained it, I was, like so many of my generation, continually disappointed by the failure of human behaviour to confirm it; disappointed by the failure of people to be reasonable, by the failure of the socialist millennium to arrive, by the betrayals of politicians, by the obstructiveness of officials, by the superstition and fecklessness of the masses and by their preference for the cinema to Shakespeare and for Mr. Sinatra to Beethoven—above all, by the recurrent fact of war.

As the melancholy history of the last thirty-five years unfolded itself, the liberal, optimistic view of human nature and the expectation of continual progress which it engendered, tolerable in the first decade of the century, came to seem increasingly untenable. A time came when I could hold it no longer. Indeed, in retrospect, one was left to wonder how it could ever have stood the test of the most cursory acquaintance with the facts of human history. For what, after all, is human history but a story of battles, sieges, massacres, murders, tortures, persecution, rape, arson and the mass deportations of populations, a record, as Gibbon points out, of "the crimes, follies and misfortunes of mankind." And this long record of grievous events has been inscribed by those fundamental elements in human nature of which it is the outcome; by the pride, self interest, envy, ambition, covetousness, hatred, malice and cruelty of successive generations of human beings. Finding myself in the end no longer able to write off man's "sinfulness"—there is no other word for it—as a mere by-product of circumstance, I came to a conviction of the truth of the Christian doctrine of original sin, and to believe with the Ninth of the Thirty-nine Articles, that "original sin . . . is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam."

With that came as a corollary, the beliefs:

(1) That it was only with divine assistance that the evil that was in man could be not overcome—for that could never be—but lessened in its degree and mitigated in its expression.

(2) That this assistance would, in fact, be vouchsafed in answer to prayer.

I came, in fact, to hold the Christian doctrine of God's Grace which, if we prayed for it with faith, would enter into a man's heart and enable him to control the worst excesses of the "natural" man.

I am not here concerned to enquire into the truth

of these doctrines, nor do I seek to defend them. My purpose is to point out their implications, more particularly in their bearing upon the Shavian philosophy of Creative Evolution which I had formerly held. For the belief that evil is natural to man is intolerable unless you can also bring yourself to believe that there is a power outside man which will help him in the struggle against it, and, it may be, give him an assurance that ultimately evil will be overcome. But the victory over evil will not be won in this world or on the level of this order of reality. It follows, then, that this world is not the only world nor this the only order of reality, but that in addition to the natural there is also the realm of the supernatural.

Hence, the view of evil as endemic and incorrigible in the natural order seems to me, if it is to be rendered tolerable, to require as corollaries (1) that this is not the only order; (2) that there is a Being who, though not part of the natural world, nevertheless created it and will on occasion assist its struggling creatures by the infusion of divine grace. Now, once these beliefs have been admitted into the citadel of the intellect, it is difficult to prevent the whole doctrine of Christianity following in their train and one finds oneself committed to a metaphysic very different from the Shavian. It is a metaphysic which accepts a dual universe and a dual nature of man; which maintains that evil is real and interprets ethics as the struggle to overcome it; but which holds out no hope either of ultimate happiness or of perfection for man, or for any possible development of man, on the plane of the natural order.

*The Responsibility of the Body*

It is not, I repeat, my concern here to develop this metaphysic. I venture, however, to return to the point that it was the imperatives that arose from my very different body and, therefore, the large part played by what I have called B.C. in my total make up which

constituted the starting point of what has become a radical departure from the basic doctrines of Shaw's philosophy. For it was my body and the appetites of my body that first gave me the sense of sin which Shaw is so uniquely without. This is not to say that my present philosophy is all of a piece; it still retains considerable traces of the Shavian doctrine which I have held for so long, traces which will, I suppose, never be wholly eliminated. Just as a new house built upon old foundations will always retain the form of its foundations, the human body, the vestigial organs which bear witness to the animal origin from which it has evolved, the adult man, some of the characteristics of the boy that he has outgrown, so the pupil is bound to retain many elements of the teaching of the master which, officially, he has repudiated. For a man's mind is like a moving staircase upon which his thoughts ascend or descend from step to step. The deliverances of his mind upon one step do not accord with its deliverances when he moves to a lower or steps to a higher. Yet no man, as Shaw himself points out, who is not spiritually and intellectually dead can remain for more than a certain period upon the same step.